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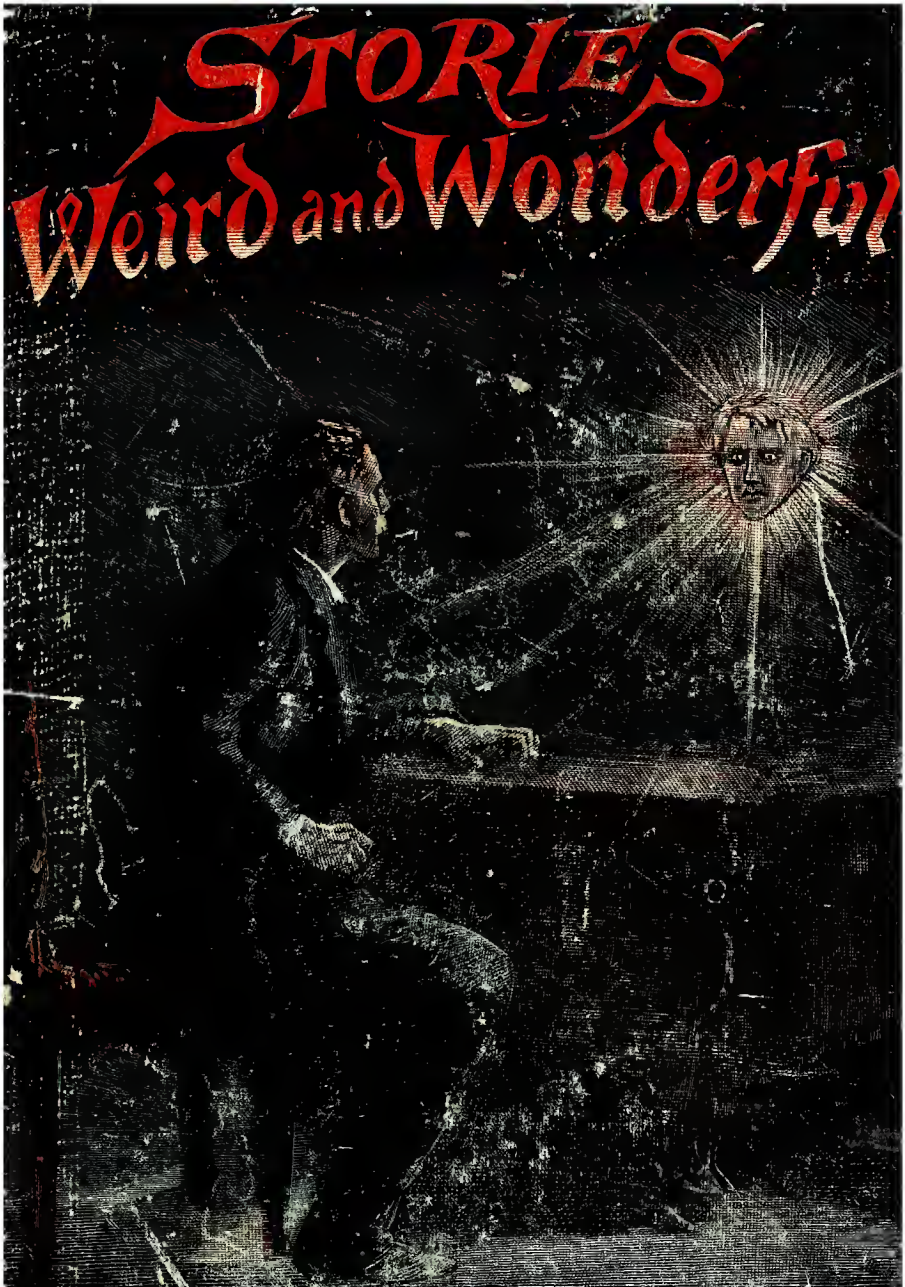

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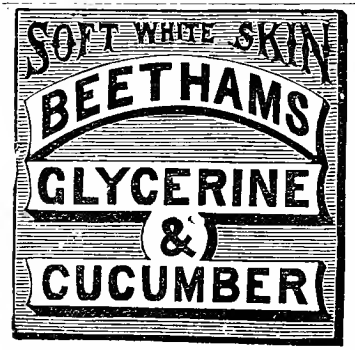

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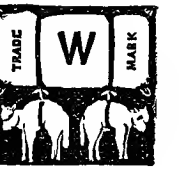

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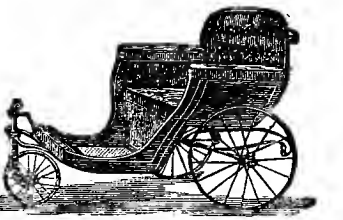

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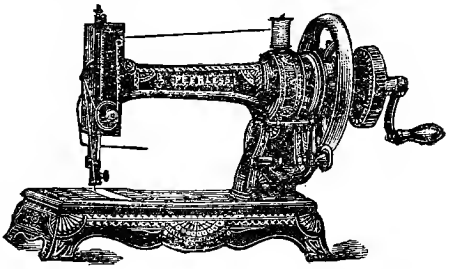

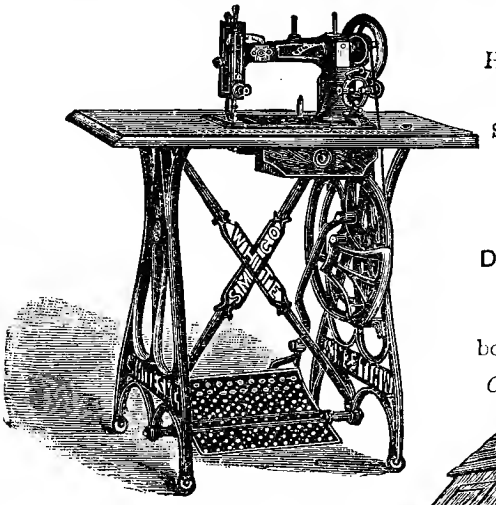

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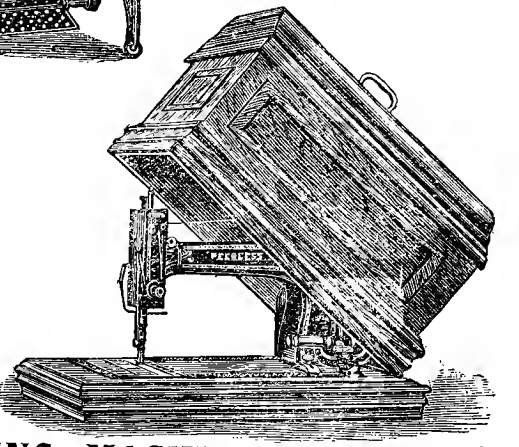

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	THE STRANGE STORY OF MAJOR WEIR	1
II.	THE WHITE LADY OF THE RIVER—A CLYDE LEGEND	13
III.	THE BLUE STAR	24
IV.	THE SPECTRE OF BARROCHAN	39
V.	THE PIPER OF CULLODEN	55
VI.	SOME EXPERIMENTS WITH A HEAD	68
VII.	JOHN MACDOUGAL'S DOUBLE	79
VIII.	THE BRIDE OF DEATH	92
IX.	THE UNBIDDEN GUEST	106
X.	THE CHINA DOG	119
XI.	THE HAUNTED MAN	133
XII.	RUTH	148
XIII.	A GHOST FROM THE SEA	160
XIV.	THE SHINING HAND	173
XV.	A NIGHT WITH THE DEAD	187
XVI.	THE BLOOD DRIPS	201
XVII.	THE DREAM THAT CAME TRUE	215
XVIII.	THE COMPACT	230
XIX.	THE BELL OF DOOM	246
XX.	THE STORY OF A HANGED MAN	271
XXI.	THE CRIME OF THE RUE AUBER	294
XXII.	THE STRANGE STORY OF DR. MARTIN	306

I

THE STRANGE STORY OF MAJOR WEIR

THE craze for supplanting old things with new is responsible for much Vandalism; while the modern besom of reform has swept away some of the most picturesque buildings in all our large cities. Even the eerie things that stalked the land during the hours of darkness, and only fled back to their abodes of gloom and mystery as the cocks crew and the glimmering dawn began to assert itself, have been exorcised from their accustomed haunts by the joiner's saw and the bricklayer's trowel, and many a once familiar spirit that made our grandparents' flesh creep is known no more.

Nothing, perhaps, that ever came from the unseen world was better known up to 1878 than the ghosts of the terrible Major Weir and his awful sister, Grizel. For over two hundred years they haunted, to the terror of the neighbourhood, the scenes so familiar to them while on earth, and there was hardly an inhabitant of the region around the historical West Bow in Edinburgh who had not at some time or other seen the ghosts of the wicked Major or his infamous sister. The dark and grim alley that led to the house so long the residence of the Major and Grizel when they were in the flesh was passed with a shudder. Boys and girls avoided it as they would a nest of serpents, and when darkness had fallen the man or woman was hardly to be found who would have ventured down that accursed passage. For strange apparitions, like black and silent shadows, flitted about; and though

the Major's house had long been tenantless, for no one could be induced to live in such a place, unearthly noises echoed through its decaying chambers at night, and lights that came from no earthly gas or candles gleamed from the begrimed windows. And sometimes, when a belated traveller, nervously wending his way homeward, passed the haunted alley, he has been suddenly almost turned to stone with horror by observing a headless, coal-black horse, of gigantic proportions, with blood and fire streaming from its neck, issue forth, ridden by the grinning spectre of Major Weir, though, in a few moments, horse and rider would suddenly vanish in a whirlwind of blue flame. Anything more frightful than this apparition could not be imagined, and yet it was by no means uncommon. And sometimes the inhabitants of the Bow, when peacefully sleeping in their beds, were aroused by the thundering of a ponderous coach, drawn by six fiery steeds at full gallop. It came up the Lawn Market, shook the very foundations of the solid houses in the Bow, as it tore along to the head of the terrible close, as alleys are called in Scotland, where it paused for a few minutes, and then thundered back again, leaving behind it sheets of flame and an overpowering smell of sulphur. Strange as it may sound now, this equipage was driven by the Evil One himself, who came to take back the Major and his sister after they had spent a night's leave of absence in their former earthly abode. All this is changed, however, for in 1878 the 'Improvement Commission' of Edinburgh, with ruthless hand, improved the Major's house and the dreadful close off the face of the earth for ever, and the disgusted ghosts walked no more. But who was Major Weir? some may ask. Well, he was a native of Kirktown, in Lanarkshire, and was born about the beginning of the sixteenth century. His mother was a sorceress of great repute, and it was only natural she should, at an early stage of his career, initiate her son into the mysteries of the black art. This did not prevent him, however, from becoming a soldier, for in 1641 we find he was a lieutenant in the Scottish army that was

sent by the Covenanters to Ireland to protect the Ulster settlers. In this capacity he saw considerable service, being present at the storming of Carrickfergus and the sanguinary battle of Benburb. During this battle he was furiously attacked by a native armed with a formidable pike, with which he made a tremendous lunge at his foe, but at that moment a great black hand came out of space, seized the pike, and hurled it away; and so startled was the native by this remarkable apparition that he fell down in a fit and expired.

For his Irish services Weir received promotion, and became a major. Soon afterwards he was appointed to the command of the 'Guard of Edinburgh,' and in that capacity he had charge of the military arrangements during the execution of the great Montrose. He was a striking-looking man, powerfully built, and had a massive, sullen, repellent sort of face. His eyes were small, but burned like jets of fire, while his hair was coal black. On being appointed to his command in Edinburgh he took up his lodgings in the house in the West Bow, and that house was destined to bear the most evil of reputations ever after. His sister Grizel, as remarkable-looking a woman as he was a man, came to reside with him, and this strange couple began then to hold direct intercourse with the Prince of Darkness, who presented the Major with an ebony staff that bestowed upon its possessor extraordinary powers of eloquence.

The night on which the Unholy One and Major Weir made their compact in the Major's house the elements were disturbed in such a manner that the oldest inhabitant could remember nothing like it. An intense gloom enveloped the city, and from out the piled-up masses of clouds there suddenly leapt sheets of flame, followed by peals of thunder that shook the solid earth and caused many women and children to die of fright. Then ensued a deluge of rain that flooded the streets and drowned hundreds of cattle and sheep grazing in the fields. Many houses were struck by lightning, as well

as people, and the destruction and distress caused by this most awful storm were tremendous.

During the time that the storm was at its height a strange little old man, enveloped in a large black cloak, appeared in the Major's room. Where he came from or how he got in it is impossible to say. It is equally impossible to tell precisely what passed between this little old man who announced himself as 'The Prince of Darkness' and the Major and his sister. But this much, at least, is known, that the Prince handed the Major an ebony staff, telling him that slave never obeyed his master so well as that staff would obey him. It would fetch and carry, confer upon him extraordinary eloquence, and render him invulnerable to everything except *a single burn*. The Prince advised the Major to devote himself to 'praying and expounding,' as that would give him great influence with the people, and was the surest way to worldly advancement. Accordingly, we find it stated in 'Fraser's MS.' in the Advocates' Library at Edinburgh, that 'he (Weir) became so notoriously regarded among the Presbyterian sect that if four met together be sure that Major Weir was one. At private meetings he prayed to admiration, which made many of that stamp court his converse. He never married, but lived in a private house with his sister, Grizel Weir. Many resorted to his house to join with him and to hear him pray; but it was observed that he could not officiate in any holy duty without the black staff or rod in his hand and leaning upon it, which made those who heard him pray admire his power of prayer, his ready extemporary expression, his heavenly gesture, so that he was thought more an angel than a man, and was termed by some of the holy sisters ordinarily "Angelical Thomas."'

In spite, however, of this outward show of sanctity the Major was engaged in wizardry that was truly astonishing, while his inner life was darkened by crimes of the most repulsive kind. On one occasion, having conceived a dislike to two of his neighbours, a man and woman who had given him

some offence, he invited them to supper. During the meal he summoned his master the Devil, who appeared in his most horrifying aspect. When the guests saw this frightful apparition they both went raving mad, and Satan then touched them on the forehead and killed them. Where he touched them was a large blue mark, and as soon as they were dead he whisked them through the window and laid them side by side at the top of the close, where they were found next morning. The discovery caused great consternation in the Bow, and the strange blue mark on the forehead of each corpse convinced people that something uncanny had caused their death, though what that was was never known until the terrible Major himself confessed years afterwards.

At length, however, retribution was to overtake this very wicked man and his equally wicked sister. After a long course of iniquity, and when he was verging on seventy years of age, the Major fell seriously ill. This illness had such an effect upon his mind that he made open confession of his wickedness and of his compact with the Fiend. So astounding and seemingly incredible was the story he told that Sir Andrew Ramsay of Abbotshall, who was Lord-Provost of Edinburgh from 1662 to 1673, refused at first to order his arrest. But to such a pitch of furiousness rose the outcry against the wizard and his sister that at last the Provost had them conveyed to the Tolbooth, together with the magic ebony staff. One of the bailies was then sent to search the Major's house, and amongst other things he found a quantity of money wrapped up in pieces of cloth. A scrap of this cloth was inadvertently cast on the fire, when it caused a tremendous report that was heard all over the Bow. The money was taken by the magistrate to his own house, but no sooner had he arrived than the pieces flew out of the bag in which they were being carried, and banged themselves about, smashing windows and furniture to fragments, and it was only when the bailie and his appalled family offered up a prayer that the demoniacal money flew up the chimney and was seen no more.

While lying in prison waiting to be tried, the Major seems to have become still more conscience-stricken, so that he made the most astounding revelations, and the sensation these revelations caused throughout Edinburgh was immense. People could hardly believe that such things could be possible. Of course, the confession only served to seal his doom still more surely, and when, on April 9, 1670, he was brought before the Justiciary Court, the verdict was a foregone conclusion. He and his sister, however, were duly tried, and the Major was sentenced to be 'strangled and burned between Edinburgh and Leith,' while Grizel was to be hanged in the Grassmarket. As soon as he was conveyed back to prison he was earnestly urged to pray to heaven for pardon. But, according to 'Law's Memorials,' he exclaimed, 'Torment me no more. I am tormented enough already.' He strenuously declined to see a clergyman.

In due course he was brought out for execution, and as he was placed over the fire with the rope round his neck some pious people urged him to say, 'Lord, be merciful to me'; but he replied fiercely, 'Let me alone. I will not say anything of the kind. I have lived as a beast and must die like a beast.'

As soon as he had been strangled his body was cast into the fire along with his ebony staff. And the horror and amazement of the spectators may be imagined when they saw this remarkable staff twist and turn about and perform the most extraordinary contortions, and all the time uttering strange sounds. Nor did it disappear until the last vestige of the Major's body had been consumed. Though even then the stick was not burnt, but it leapt high up above the flames and vanished from the sight of the appalled spectators.

As soon as the Major had been disposed of his sister was prepared for execution, but when told of her brother's death she fell to raving in the most horrible manner; and she vowed that not only was she a sorceress but that her mother before her had been a witch. She also declared that she and her brother had been in direct communication with the Devil, who on one

occasion had taken them for a drive in a fiery chariot drawn by headless horses and in broad daylight. As soon as she was brought to the place of execution she began rending her clothes, saying that she wanted to die 'with all the shame she could.' Like her brother, she refused to pray, and scoffed at those who tried to induce her to repent.

Let it not be supposed, however, that although the woman had been strangled, and the man strangled and burnt, that these people had been got rid of. Oh, dear no! for the very night following their execution the Major's house was observed to be brilliantly lighted up. From every window light gleamed, and such light, too!—utterly unlike anything the citizens were accustomed to. But this was not all, for from the house issued roars of laughter, eldritch screams, and wild shouts of revel. All night long the inhabitants of the Bow heard the thunder of invisible chariot wheels either going to or coming from the Major's house, and now and again great sheets of blue flame shot out of the grim close that gave access to the Major's door. These revels were kept up till daylight began to dawn, and then the frightened neighbours saw that the lights in the house faded out, and the shouts of the revellers were hushed.

A few nights later a woman was proceeding through the Bow carrying a lantern. She was going to visit a sick neighbour, and had a little basket on her arm filled with delicacies. As she reached the top of the dreaded close her basket and lantern were whisked away from her, and then she was frozen with horror as she beheld standing in the mouth of the close the well-known form of Grizel Weir. She appeared, however, to be of enormous stature, and was grinning horribly. This dreadful sight caused the poor woman to fall down in a fit, and she was found sometime later and conveyed to her home; but when she recovered from the fit, she related all that she had seen, and soon after she lost her reason, owing to the shock she had received. For a week or two after this nothing was observed either in the close or the Major's house, which

was shunned by everyone. But, at last, one night the neighbours heard a sound as of some tremendous body rushing through the air. On looking out of their windows they beheld a gigantic black horse, bearing on its back Major Weir. The animal's eyes were great balls of fire, and fire streamed from its nostrils. On reaching the close this mysterious steed stopped, and the Major alighted, and instantly the close was filled with strange beings, each one carrying a torch, while a wild shout greeted the Major's arrival. Then once more was the house illuminated from top to bottom, and presently, to the horror of those who were witnesses of this remarkable occurrence, a window in the Major's house was opened and a headless body was flung out, and alighted with a sickening thud on the pavement. Five minutes later, from another window, a head was flung after the body, and all night long these ghastly objects lay on the pavement, for no one who had witnessed the sickening sight dare leave his house. When the day dawned, however, people hurried down and informed the authorities of what they had seen. The head and the body were at once secured, but who the person was, no one of the many hundreds of people who saw the remains was able to recognise. The head had been cut off so evenly that there was not a jag to be seen.

No sooner had the citizens recovered from this horror before a fresh one was in store for them. Again one night unearthly sounds were heard. There was laughter such as no mortal ever uttered, and shrill screams that human throats were incapable of. And when the scared neighbours ventured to peer out they saw that every window of the Major's house was wide open, and at each window was a grinning skeleton, the eyeless sockets being filled with balls of blue flame. The whole thing was hideous and appalling, and no wonder that some of those that were eye-witnesses lost their reason. But probably the most appalling sight of all was that which was witnessed by Mistress Margaret Donaldson and her maid. This good lady was of exceeding piety, and had great renown

for truthfulness; while her maid was a most virtuous woman, and had been in Mistress Donaldson's service for over twenty years.

The lady was a widow, very comely and much sought after by the beaux of the period. Her husband had been a barber and a very industrious man, and, having accumulated some money, he was enabled to leave his widow very comfortably off; and as it was believed it was her money and not herself that was sought after, she turned a deaf ear to her many sighing suitors, and resolved to keep the memory of her departed green. Now, it happened that Mistress Donaldson had a very intimate friend in the person of Mistress Williamson, also a widow, who resided in the Bow, and not very far from the haunted house of Major Weir. One afternoon Mistress Williamson invited a few select friends, including Mistress Donaldson, to drink a dish of hot spiced ale, and discuss the current topics of the day. Mistress Donaldson, accompanied by her maid Jessie, proceeded to her friend's house about four of the clock in the afternoon of a November day. The ladies enjoyed themselves for two or three hours with much gossip, and did not consume more than three dishes of ale each. About seven of the clock Mistress Donaldson prepared to depart. At that time a thick mist enveloped the city, and a small rain was descending. The lady put on her pattens and wrapped her cloak about her, and then, preceded by Jessie, who carried the lantern, started for her home. Her route passed that grim and mysterious close which led to the Major's house. On reaching the head of the close the frightened maid suddenly whispered to her mistress:

'God guard us, for I declare this is Major Weir's close!' She had scarcely spoken the words, when she uttered a piercing scream, and cried out, 'Oh, oh, somebody has got hold of me!'

Her mistress rebuked her for what she termed her 'frivolity,' and told her that the small dish of beer with the

few drops of brandy that she had partaken of before starting, to keep the fog from affecting her throat, must have gone to her head, but in a few moments the good lady herself cried out:

'Losh me, if there isna' an arm round my ain waist!'

Instantly the two women were whirled round and round in a mad gallop, and the maid's lantern went flying up through the air. Then they were both whirled at a giddy pace down the awful close. The door of the Major's house was flung open, and a great blaze of blinding light streamed forth. The unseen partners of the two women, who were now almost dead with fright, lifted them into the passage, and the door closed with a bang. Upstairs they were carried to the great room, which was illuminated as for a ball, and here, exhausted and frightened out of their wits, they sank down on to a stool. But now they were to behold the most appalling sight ever seen by human eyes. The door at the end of the room was suddenly opened with a clang, and Major Weir and his awful sister appeared, escorted by the Prince of Darkness, who bowed with great politeness to the maid and mistress.

Following this strange trio, trooped in fifty pairs of skeletons arm in arm. Anything more ghastly than this little army of grinning, chapless skeletons could not be conceived by the brain of man. The luckless women seemed to turn to stone with horror, and yet though they were deadly cold the perspiration streamed from them. At a given signal the skeletons, together with the Major and his sister, arranged themselves for a minuet. Then strange and unearthly music struck up from some unseen orchestra, and the skeletons having bowed to each other began to dance, the Major and his sister leading the way. The rattling of the bones of these fleshless dancers was horrible, and made the blood of the women curdle in their veins. Presently the minuet ceased, and the dancers formed themselves for a reel. Two skeletons, to the terror of the women, approached them, and seizing

them round the waist lifted them into the centre of the room. Then the music struck up again, and the dance of death began. It was awful. Round and round the room flew the skeletons in one awful mad stampede, their bones rattling in time to the strange music, and their fleshless jaws clicking and snapping as if these tenants of the grave were roaring with laughter. The Major and his sister seemed to be everywhere. They whirled round and round like a maëlstrom, and with amazing rapidity, while the Evil One sat on a high chair at the end of the room and appeared to enjoy the spectacle.

How long the infernal revels were kept up the unfortunate women could not say. All they knew was that quite suddenly the dancers stood stock still. The lights went out, the maid and her mistress were carried downstairs, through the doorway, along the close, and deposited on the pavement, where they became unconscious through the shock they had received, and where they were found in the dawn by the watch. They were at once conveyed home, and poor Mrs. Donaldson took to her bed, for that awful scene had been too much for her. A raging fever ensued, and in a week she was dead, but, before dying, she gave to the clergyman who attended her a circumstantial account of the ghastly ball at which she had been present, and this account was corroborated in every detail by the maid.

It is needless to say that after this Major Weir's house was more shunned than ever, and for a hundred years it remained without an earthly tenant, though it was haunted all that time by the Major and his ghostly companions. At length the unfortunate owner, who had been unable to either let or sell his property, determined to try and obtain a tenant who might for a time sit rent free, in order to break the fearful spell that had so long hung over the accursed place. At length such a tenant was found in one William Patullo and his wife. Patullo had been a soldier, and was a very wild, reckless, and somewhat dissipated man. He was wont to declare that he did not care for either man or devil, and the prospect

of getting a house rent free induced him to accept the owner's offer. When it had become known that at last a tenant had been found for the haunted house of Major Weir, the excitement in the town was immense, and Patullo was looked upon with extraordinary interest. At length he and his spouse removed to their new quarters, but their very first night's experience deterred them and everyone else from ever again making the experiment. The honest man and his wife had not been long in bed before a remarkable phosphorescent glow seemed to pervade the room, and a noise that had no counterpart in earthly noises fell on the affrighted ears of the new tenants. Then, with eyeballs almost starting from their heads with terror, they beheld a gigantic beast, having a resemblance in form to a calf, but without a head. This strange creature put its two fore-paws on the stock of the bed and reared upright in all its ghastly headlessness, great streams of blood spouting from its neck. The woman fainted, and the man was spellbound, but presently he was enabled to murmur a prayer for protection, and then the frightful and appalling vision vanished.

Next day, as soon as ever it was light, the rash pair quitted the place, and no attempt was ever afterwards made to inhabit it.[1]

[1] Scotch readers will know that this is not fiction, and English ones may be told that it is absolutely true that for a hundred and fifty years Major Weir's house remained tenantless save by its evil spirits, though over and over again it was offered to people for nothing. But a curse had fallen on it, and nothing could remove that curse, until at last the Improvement Commission rooted the place up, crop and stone, thus purging it from its evil reputation, and banishing for ever the ghosts of the wicked Major Weir and his terrible sister.

II

THE WHITE WITCH OF THE RIVER—A CLYDE LEGEND

MANY, many years ago, long before Helensburgh, on the River Clyde, had grown into the important place that it is now; when, in fact, it was only a primitive fishing village, whose inhabitants knew little of the world beyond their own doors, there dwelt there an honest fisher-lad, named Robin Rennie. He had been a fisher all his days, as his father and grandfather had before him, and no more fearless boatman existed in that part of the country. He was of an adventurous turn of mind, too, and had explored the lonely Loch Long, Loch Goil, the Gareloch, and the Holy Loch, which, as all travellers by the Clyde know, run north from the river, with the exception of the Holy Loch, which trends west, and back into the mountains. Wild and mysterious were these regions in those days, for the iron horse had not broken the solitudes of mountain and moorland, where the lordly eagle still held sway, and the hill fox reared her cubs in peace. In fact

> So wondrous wild, the whole might seem
> The scenery of a fairy dream.

And many, indeed, were the strange stories that were told of beings, not of mortal mould, who roamed about in these mountain fastnesses. Robin in his wanderings had often seen some of these creatures, and at night, round the turf

fire, when the wind whistled shrilly about the cottages with their thatched roofs, he was wont to tell eerie stories to his awe-struck companions, who listened with open eyes and gaping mouths until their hair rose on end, and the blood curdled in their veins. The simple folk, in fact, used to say that there was something uncanny about Robin himself, and it was a common belief that he had made some unholy compact with the evil spirits that haunted the lochs and the gloomy glens. One thing is certain: he would start off alone on the darkest night, and with his boat penetrate up one or other of the lochs, and would return when day broke with his boat laden with fish. Now, is it not certain that to do this he must have had supernatural aid? At least that is what the simple villagers thought and even said. Then again he often journeyed to the wondrous wild Loch Long, and would sometimes be absent two and three days together. When he was asked how he found shelter during his absence in such an inhospitable place, he replied that he lived in the ruins of Carrick Castle. Well, indeed, might his listeners shudder when they heard this, for no man residing in the neighbourhood would have had the hardihood to doubt that Carrick Castle was the haunt of ghouls and spirits.

Loch Long runs for nearly eighteen miles, trending north and east, but half-way it is joined by Loch Goil, which trends to the west, and Carrick Castle frowns on the gloomy loch from a lofty crag, and many a stirring scene of bloodshed has it witnessed. Loch Goil is merely a narrow arm of the sea, at its broadest point not exceeding a mile, while the rocky sides are rent with many a seam, and in places so steep as to be inaccessible, and the peaks that tower above reach at their highest points 2,000 to 2,500 feet. Midway up this rock-bound strip of water stands the Castle, that in some far-off time must have been a place of immense strength, and was so, in fact, down to 1685, when a body of wild hill men, instigated by the personal enemies of the Marquis of Argyll, to whom the stronghold then belonged, swept down from the

mountains when the place was undefended, and with fire and rams turned it into a blackened ruin, so that it was said when referring to the Argylls—

> Their old Castle Carrick is peeled to its walls,
> And fleshless things grin in its once lordly halls.

Time dealt kindly with the ruin, clothing its blackened walls with ivy and lichen; but the raven and the night-owl made it their abode, and strange spirits revelled there. Yet to this place Robin Rennie was in the habit of going and passing two or three days at a time; and it was whispered that it was in this ghostly ruin he had made his fearsome compact, whereby he was enabled to fill his boat with fish when other fishers were afraid to put to sea. What the compact stipulated he should give in return for this privilege was not stated.

Rennie had the reputation of being well off, and he was the sole support of his widowed mother and a crippled brother. He had built a neat cottage that stood facing the river, and was the best cottage in all the village. He was a fine, stalwart young man, and not bad-looking, although he had such a peculiar expression about his steel-grey eyes that some folk shunned him as being possessed of the 'evil eye.'

Notwithstanding the reputation he had thus acquired, there were plenty of girls in the village who would have jumped at him had he but given them the slightest encouragement; but, strange to say, he seemed to shun all female society, though there were those in the village who were ready to affirm most solemnly that they had seen him occasionally in the gloaming seated in his boat, accompanied by a most beautiful woman, dressed all in white, who was known as 'The White Witch of the River.'

She was a being of radiant beauty; with hair like a raven's plume, and a form of faultless mould, while her eyes shone like gleaming gold; and with a voice that was low and sweet, she could lure men to her feet, unless they turned their eyes

to heaven and uttered a prayer. It was fatal to hear this syren singing, as she often did when the gloaming had enfolded the hills in purple shadows; or the pale moon made a silvery track on the river. Often at such a time the marvellous creature was seen gliding down the river like a mist-wreath from off the hill-side. But those who saw her would instantly avert their gaze and hurry away, lest, with her flute-like voice, she should lure them to destruction.

And yet, although it was known that the White Witch of the River fascinated men to follow her in order to drown them in the blue depths of the lonely lochs, there were those who asserted solemnly that they had seen her with Robin Rennie in his boat. No wonder, therefore, that he came to be shunned by many of the villagers as an uncanny person with an evil eye. In disposition he was somewhat morose, and seemed to prefer solitude. But with these exceptions, no one could say aught against him. He was kind to his mother and crippled brother, and they believed that he was the cleverest youth for many miles round, and that some day he would be a great man. But if the old people and the men looked upon him with suspicion, many of the young women uttered a silent sigh as he passed them. To all except one, however, he was utterly indifferent. But this one did not live in Helensburgh. She was the daughter of a rich merchant in Greenock. Two or three nights a week Robin would sail his boat across the river from Helensburgh to Greenock, and secretly meet this young lady, so that it seemed as if she favoured his suit. Her name was Florence, and she enjoyed the reputation of being the belle of Greenock. It is difficult to say when they first met or how their acquaintance grew; the fact remains she was, all unknown to her father and her brother, in the habit of meeting him and allowing him to talk love to her. Perhaps he had fascinated her with his evil eye, and she bore him no real love. At any rate, one night when he crossed the river and landed at the usual spot, where he had been in the habit of finding her waiting for him, instead

of Florence there were two men. They at once announced themselves as the father and brother of Florence. They said she had confessed that she had been in the habit of granting him stolen interviews, thus disgracing her family. They had come now to caution him to return no more. Florence, they said, was not for the likes of him, and they had resolved that if he returned again they would kill him.

Drawing himself up proudly he told them with scorn in his voice, and with the fire of indignation flashing from his eyes, that he should return again and again until he heard from the girl's own lips that she loved him not.

This haughty and defiant answer aroused the father and son to fury, and, each being armed with a stout stick, they suddenly fell upon him and beat him until he fell senseless to the ground. Thinking he was dead, and being frightened now lest the crime should be discovered, they lifted his body and carried it to the very edge of the water, so that when the tide rose and receded again it would bear his corpse out to sea. They next set his boat adrift, knowing that if it was found, as it was almost sure to be, it would create an impression he had fallen out and been drowned. This done, they went away, believing that they had rid themselves for ever of the troublesome lover.

A few minutes later the moon came from behind a dense mass of black cloud and lighted the water up with the sheen of silver, and presently what seemed like a wreath mist, but having a vague resemblance to a woman, floated gracefully along the silvery path of light, and as it came nearer the shore it developed into the perfect shape and form of 'The White Witch of the River.'

Truly she was a being of the most dazzling beauty—a beauty that was unearthly. Her eyes gleamed like stars on a frosty night; her face, faultless in all its features, was white and cold like the face of a marble statue; and the deathly whiteness of the face was enhanced by her blue-black hair that hung like a great veil down her back to her feet. A robe

of spotless white, that seemed to be woven from gossamer or mist, clung to her rounded limbs in the most graceful folds, while round her waist was a girdle of jewels that broke into a thousand points of dazzling fire as the moonlight caught it.

With a wave of her white arm she arrested the drifting boat, and then, with another wave, drew it towards the shore, and, when its keel grated on the shingle, she slightly stooped and raised the insensible Robin as if he had only been a feather. Gently she placed him in his boat, and then, by some invisible power, the sail was raised. This done, the White Witch faded away, but a strange cloud of rosy, luminous mist entirely enveloped the boat, which sped along before a strong wind, though the cloud of mist went with it.

On went the boat with extraordinary speed: down the river first of all until it reached the mouth of the Holy Loch; then the same invisible power that had guided it so far turned its prow almost due north, and, with the luminous cloud still enveloping it, it sped up Loch Long to where Loch Goil joins it and runs towards the west. Up Loch Goil went the boat until it stranded at the head of the loch; then the luminous cloud faded away.

By-and-by the mountains began to stand out clear and distinct in the pearly light of the coming dawn; and gradually the purple that lay on mountain and water warmed to gold, until at last the weird landscape was ablaze with the brilliant fire of the rising sun, whose rays seemed to revive Robin Rennie, so that he sat up in his boat and gazed wonderingly around him.

For some little time he appeared to be dazed, and he passed his hand repeatedly over his eyes as if trying to clear his mental vision.

'Was it a dream?' he muttered, as he began to recall the events of the preceding night.

No, it could not be a dream, for he had an ugly wound in his temple where he had been struck, and almost every bone in his body ached. But how was it he had got to where he

then found himself? It was a long way from Greenock, and he had not the slightest recollection of anything after Florence's father and brother attacked him. All after that was shrouded in the deepest mystery to him; but when he remembered how shamefully he had been treated he became furious, and stepping on shore he wandered like one distraught into the gloomy glen that begins at the head of Loch Goil and runs west to Loch Fyne. Down this strange and desolate glen runs the *Styx*, and the wild, rugged mountains, bleak and barren, rise up so high on either side as to involve the glen in almost constant gloom, while the only sound that breaks the silence is the hoarse cry of the ravens. It seemed to be a fitting place for Robin to give vent to his wrath, and,

> While the mists
> Flying, and rainy vapours, call out shapes
> And phantoms from the crags and solid earth,

to utter an oath that he would yet possess Florence and be revenged for the outrage upon him.

For three days he remained in this weird solitude, not wishing to return to his people showing traces of the outrage he had been subjected to. He lived as best he could on herbs and berries, and at night he crept for shelter under some jutting rock. During the dark hours, too, he heard strange sounds and witnessed strange sights, for the glen was the home of 'fleshless things.' Blue lights flitted about, and every now and again, out of the blackness, were evoked nebulous forms that bore some resemblance to human beings. These forms seemed to be indulging in fantastic dances, form, ing chains, crossing and recrossing each other's path, bowing and receding, and then suddenly vanishing into the darkness from whence they had come. And there were sighings and moanings, and eldritch screams that woke the echoes with startling sharpness. All night long these uncanny sights and sounds went on, but the fleshless things slunk away when the morning light first beamed, and the only sounds heard then

were the hoarse murmuring of the Styx, and the ravens' dismal croaking. At last Robert Rennie had so far recovered that he left this haunted spot, and sailing down the loch returned to his people.

Many were the questions asked of him, and great was the wonderment expressed at his changed appearance; for his face looked careworn and haggard, and he had become more grave and morose. To the questions he made no answer; to the wonderment he was stolidly indifferent.

For weeks he brooded over his wrongs, while the sullen gloom that seemed to have settled on his face repelled people from him, and he was shunned with fear. Scarcely a night passed now, no matter what the weather was, but he went out in his boat, and his neighbours whispered one to another—and shuddered while they avowed—that the White Witch of the River was frequently sitting beside him as he sat at the tiller.

Whatever the mystery was, Robert kept it to himself. The seal of silence was on his lips. But that he still thought of Florence was proved one day as an old woman from the village was crossing to Greenock to transact some business. He took her aside, and, putting a piece of gold in her hand, bade her deliver secretly a message to the girl. The message was in the form of a prayer and a threat. He prayed her to meet him at the old trysting-place for the last time in order that he might bid her farewell for ever, and she was to be informed that if she failed to come a dreadful calamity would befall her and her people. Faithful to her trust, the old woman delivered the message, and Florence was evidently influenced by it, for, after deep reflection, she bade the messenger say she would keep the tryst.

Two nights later Robert crossed the river to Greenock. It was a strange night, weird and gloomy. Great jagged black clouds filled the sky, and between the rents the moonlight sometimes streamed, calling into being gigantic and fantastic shadows that flitted over the river and the landscape.

The wind blew coldly in from the sea, and it moaned like a thing in pain. The month was October. The sere leaves were dropping from the trees, and the trees themselves shivered and sobbed in the pitiless gale.

A quarter of an hour after Robert had sprung on shore Florence appeared. She was enveloped in a large cloak, and seemed to be excited and flurried.

'What wish you with me?' she asked in a voice so stern and so unlike the loving tones that he was in the habit of hearing from her, that he started back and exclaimed:

'Surely this is not *my* Florence!'

'No, not yours, though I once thought I was,' she answered with a sigh. 'But I have seen my error. You fascinated me. I mistook my feeling for love. I must have been mad, but I am mad no longer. We part, and part for ever. But I have come in deference to your wishes, and, for the sake of what we have been to each other, to say farewell. My coming here is not unattended with risk, for I shudder to think what the consequences may be if my father and my brother discover my absence. So what you have to say you must say quickly, and let me go.'

He listened to her in gloomy silence. When she finished speaking he asked her in a voice that seemed hollow and broken:

'Is your love for me quite dead?'

'I never had love for you,' she answered. 'I thought at the time it was love, but I know now I was mistaken.'

'You have been false to me, then,' he cried with passionate earnestness. 'You have lured me into a belief that you loved me, only to fling me off now with heartless cruelty. But it shall not be. We will not part. You shall be mine, even though we are wedded in death.'

With a shudder of fear she shrank from him, and at that moment sounds of hurrying and approaching footsteps were heard. Some instinct, perhaps, told her that her father and brother were coming to seek her. She turned as if she

intended to run forward and meet them, but at the same instant Robert Rennie caught her in his powerful arms, and as she struggled to free herself she uttered a shrill and piercing scream that went echoing round the hills until it died down on the night wind with a melancholy wail. He carried her over the shingle to his boat, placed her in it, and pushing off sprang in himself, and hoisted the sail just as the father and brother appeared in sight.

Florence made a frantic appeal to them to rescue her, and almost beside themselves they rushed along the shore until they saw a fisherman's boat moored to a stake. Regardless of cold and wet they swam out to it, and, getting in, hoisted the sail and started in pursuit. But Rennie's boat had got a long start, and now that strange luminous cloud seemed to envelope it again. The moonlight fell in broken bars across the dark water that was fretted into foaming wavelets by the salt sea wind. Fear had overcome Florence, and she had fallen in a faint at the bottom of the boat. Grim and silent, with face white as the moonbeam rays, Robert Rennie sat in the stern-sheets holding the tiller and looking always ahead, never back.

On went the pursued and the pursuer, the latter gaining slowly but surely, for the two men propelled with oars as well as the sail. The wind increased as they neared the mouth of the loch, and the boats sped on at fearful speed until they entered Loch Long. The pursuing boat was then within a few yards of the other. Florence still lay insensible, and Robert, with scarcely a sign of life, still sat grasping the tiller. Then from out the luminous cloud two long arms seemed to stretch, and, lifting the inanimate form of Florence, they raised her up, and let her fall into the sea in front of the advancing boat. A cry of horror burst from the lips of father and son, and the hills seemed to echo and re-echo a wild and mocking peal of laughter. The two men stopped their boat, and, seizing the clothes of the poor girl as they were expanded on the dark waters, they dragged her in; but she was cold

and white as veined marble, and never would she be otherwise, for she was stone dead.

Robert Rennie, who had never so much as looked round, still sat in the stern, and his boat tore on up the loch. But he was not alone. Another form sat beside him—a form of exquisite and unearthly beauty. It was the form of the White Witch of the River; her arm was round his waist, her head was pillowed on his shoulder, and her night-black hair fell over him like a funeral pall.

As the broken-hearted father and son bore back their dear, dead burden, the boat containing Rennie and his ghostly companion sped away up the loch until it was lost to sight. Then the gathering clouds in the sky grew denser, until the moonlight was blotted out. A sobbing rain fell, and the wind shrieked from the sea and lashed the water into hissing foam, like the wind of death. When the morning broke the coast people declared they had not experienced such a wild night for many and many a day.

For many a long month no tale nor tidings of Robert Rennie were ever heard. But when winter snows were melting before the genial breath of spring, a shepherd, searching for some strayed sheep in the gloomy recesses of the glen, found the skeleton of a man, and he recognised by the clothing that the dead man was Robert Rennie, and this was corroborated when a little later he found Robert Rennie's boat crushed and broken on the Lochgoilhead shore, where it had been flung on that wild, weird night.

The mystery surrounding the strange man's death was never cleared up, but, even at the present day, old wives, sitting over their winter fires, will tell you that he was lured to his destruction by the White Witch of the River.

III

THE BLUE STAR

THE following narrative is so strange and startling that possibly some of those who read it may feel a certain reserve about receiving as facts all the incidents as I have given them. Yet I solemnly asseverate that the whole story is true, although I make no attempt to offer an explanation of the weird and awful phenomena that presented themselves to me. Having a strong objection to anything like vagueness, I neither conceal names nor places; and, though for some time it was my misfortune to rest under a terrible suspicion, I shall make no attempt to disguise my identity.

My name, therefore, is Francis Preston de la Motte. I am a member of the De la Mottes of Hampshire. My family are descendants of a very old Huguenot family, many of whom fell victims to the ruthless barbarity of the tyrant and bigot Francis I. Later still, when the royal butcher, the Duke of Guise, formed a triumvirate with Saint André and the Constable Montmorency to root out what he was pleased to term 'the heresy of the Huguenots,' my direct ancestors, who had their estates in the Garonne, were amongst those who suffered most, and a broken and disheartened remnant fled to England, and ultimately established themselves in Hampshire. My family, since they rooted themselves in alien but hospitable soil, have been distinguished in literature, arts, and sciences. I was myself born in the academical town of Winchester, where my father owned a small estate,

and was well known for his liberality, sound sense, and broad views. He died universally respected, leaving me a small patrimony, and, as I believe, a fair share of his own good common sense.

I may be pardoned for referring to these strictly personal matters ; but what I wish to convey is that I am neither a visionary, a dreamer, nor a monomaniac. At least, I have never been accused of being the one or the other. That I have taken an interest, and, as I venture to hope, an intelligent interest in many of the deeper mysteries of science, I will not attempt to deny ; and those things which fall into the category of psychological phenomena have always possessed a fascination for me.

For many years before my father's death I had expressed a strong desire to travel ; but he opposed this, saying that it was his earnest wish that my youth should be passed in the classical atmosphere of one of our great public schools. It thus came about that up to the time when I reached man's estate my life was a studious one. But my father's death released me, while the small fortune he was enabled to leave me gave me the chance of at last gratifying my craving to see the world.

I made a tour through India, and had an opportunity of studying some of the occult mysteries of the higher sects of Brahmins, especially those relating to their power to hold converse with the dead ; and of their no less wonderful power of themselves being able to simulate death for long periods at a time, during which they are enabled to see the spirits of the real dead. From India I passed to Russia, where I spent two years, and, having fair lingual powers, I acquired a good knowledge of the language, so far mastering its difficulties as to be able to read some of the most abstruse authors in the original.

I had been on the move for some months, when, towards the close of a terribly snowy day, I found myself in the little town of Sergiyevski, about fifty miles to the north of Moscow,

whither I was journeying. I had travelled east from St. Petersburg as far as Vologda; thence I had turned my face south.

My going to Sergiyevski was a mere accident. I had been travelling for many hours in a mouldy, damp drosky, and was half frozen. My driver said that it would be dangerous to continue our journey on to Moscow during the darkness, for already there were signs of an increase in the snowstorm, and the road would be impassable. I therefore bade him make for the nearest trakteer, not at all sorry at the prospects of warmth and a good dinner. As the vehicle drew up at the door of the unpretentious inn, I hurried out as fast as the stiffened state of my limbs would allow me. Passing up a long passage, I entered a low-pitched room, the ceiling of which was crossed with massive smoke-blackened beams, from which depended the winter stock of wild boar hams.

As soon as I had been relieved of my heavy furs, I ordered a dish of lemoned tea by way of a preliminary, and then seated myself by the huge stove and proceeded to take stock of the company present. There was a heavily-bearded, black-visaged Jew, who puffed huge volumes of smoke from a long wooden pipe; a fierce-looking Cossack soldier, a one-eyed pedlar, and a young man, who, I ascertained, was a student at the college of Moscow, but had come to this town to visit an aunt, who was ill, and from whom he had expectations.

The Jew and the Cossack gave me a surly greeting as I sat down. The one-eyed pedlar did not speak, though he gazed at me with his one eye suspiciously; but the young student put forth his hand, greeting me cheerily, and saying in fairly good English:

'I think I am not in a mistake when I go to suppose that you from England come?'

With a bow and a smile I answered him in Russian, telling him that his supposition was correct, but that I had for some time been travelling, and recently had made a most

extensive tour through India. He at once manifested great interest in me; complimenting me on the way I spoke his language, and begging that I would relate my impressions of India, for it was a country which he had an unconquerable longing to see.

'For,' he added, 'it is a land of mystery, a land where one may shake the hand and hold converse with those who have actually been with the dead in their home beyond the grave.'

I looked at him in surprise as he made this strange remark, and from that moment I fell under the spell of this being. Here is a word-picture of his general appearance.

He was a small, delicately-built man, with hands and feet that would have done credit to a woman. His features were faultless, with an expression of dreaminess, though occasionally this gave way to a more *spirituelle* expression, but the dreaminess, somehow, seemed more natural to him. His skin was of a pure olive tint that flushed with a hectic red under the influence of excitement. The hue of his hair was raven black, and his eyes, wherein all the mystery lay, were like glittering jewels, and yet their light and fire flashed forth no warmth; they were cold—cold as steel, and in some indescribable way they gave you the impression that they were capable of reading your thoughts, of seeing the very secrets of your inner heart. His face altogether was a weird face; such a one as Fuseli or Wiertz would have loved to depict. It was capable of exerting a strange mesmeric influence, and I felt *that* the moment I gazed upon it. I am free to confess that I was influenced as I had never been influenced before, and I found myself studying him. I soon gathered that he belonged to a type of man differently organised to the generality of human beings. He was, in fact, a man I had long wished to meet, for he was one of a limited though daring class, who, scoffing at the stereotyped dogmas of the schools, give themselves up to speculative metaphysics, and, striking into original paths of thought, endeavour to penetrate some of the mysteries of the forbidden doctrines of psychomancy.

Before half an hour had passed we were chatting freely, as if we had been old acquaintances. He had been quick to gather that I took an interest in many of the subjects that fascinated him, and though he was a dreamer, an enthusiast, which I was not, there was something in common between us; a something that drew us together, so that we were enabled to throw off all reserve and at once give free expression to our thoughts.

As he had not dined I begged him to do me the honour of joining me in the dinner I had ordered, and which the landlord at that moment announced as being ready. He bowed gracefully, saying it would give him great pleasure to do so, although he was a wretched eater.

We exchanged cards, and I learned that his name was Ivan Vambéry, and during dinner he informed me that he had for a long time been studying medicine, but had devoted much of his spare time to the investigation of spiritualism, animal magnetism, electro-biology, and the truly remarkable phenomena that are exhibited by hypnotic subjects.

'And do you know, my friend,' he exclaimed in a half-serious, half-joking tone, 'in the course of my studies in anatomy I have frequently endeavoured to find the soul?'

'And, of course, you haven't succeeded in your quest?'

'Not exactly as the common herd would understand it,' he answered, with a deep seriousness now, 'for our wretched bodies being cold in death can offer us nothing but a complicated network of nerves, sinews, and muscles that quickly resolve themselves into revolting putridity. No, we must look elsewhere for the soul; we must train our eyes to pierce that mystic veil which separates the known from the unknown.'

'And have you succeeded in doing that?' I ventured to inquire.

He paused for some moments before he answered, and during the pause his keen glittering eyes were fixed upon me. Then slowly he answered:

'I have; and I have seen things such as few mortal men are permitted to see and live.'

I could not suppress a slight shudder, for his tone was so sepulchral, his manner so strange. He seemed like one who was verily speaking from the world of shadows. He quickly recovered himself, however, and expressed great delight when I told him I took an interest in the occult wonders of the spirit world. It is true I had never gone as deeply into the matter as he had done, but still the subject had a fascination for me, and I said he would find me a diligent student if he had aught to teach.

Dinner ended, we smoked a cigar, and then, as the hour was getting late, he bade me good-night, but gave me a pressing invitation to visit him at his lodgings on the morrow.

I don't know how it was, but all night long his strange face with its glittering eyes was before me, so that, notwithstanding I was worn out with fatigue, I could not sleep. I was troubled in an unaccountable manner, troubled as I had never been before; and yet I could not for the life of me have told what I was troubled about. But I know now, alas! that it was the coming of the shadow which since then has never left me. There was closing about me then, though I knew it not at the time, the gloaming of life's night, even before the noon of my existence had been reached. What I mean by that is, that with that night there passed from me all my youth, and henceforth I was to be as one who had grown old before his time. Such a nameless fear, a nervous disquietude, took hold of me, that in the solitude of my chamber I vowed to leave the town with the first dawn of day. But I might just as well have tried to fly. That man had fascinated me; had thrown a spell about me, and so I was at his chambers at the appointed hour.

Why did I go?

I cannot tell. Call it weakness if you like; but a power that has no name drew me there.

As his friends were well off, and his allowance was liberal, he was enabled to study his tastes in every way. I found him occupying luxurious apartments, and as, by his aunt's request, he was going to make a stay of some months in the town, he had surrounded himself with a choice collection of books; and his library contained rare works on transmigration, ethics, hypnotism, magnetism, &c. The walls of his sitting-room were hung with strange drawings of ghostly subjects. Many of them, he assured me, had been done by spirits from the unseen world. At one end of this apartment was a heavy black velvet curtain, which I subsequently learned screened a small laboratory; for, as he informed me, he took a great interest in chemical experiments.

Ivan Vambéry received me with great cordiality. When I entered he was attired in a long fur robe, and wore a smoking cap, trimmed with sable, which served to give his pale face a ghastly appearance. Without preliminary, he commenced at once to converse upon his favourite topics; and though I shuddered at his daring flights into the region of speculation, I experienced a sense of that fascinating pleasure one feels on witnessing the perilous and dangerous feats of a trapezist.

When I arrived in the town, it was my intention to continue my journey the following day, but under the influence of this remarkable man, I found my stay stretching into months, and still I could not go. My intimacy with Ivan ripened into a warm and close friendship, and he told me much of his past history. So absorbed did we become in the investigation of psychological phenomena that he neglected his studies, while I was all forgetful that I had friends and ties in other parts of the world. It did not take me long to discover that Ivan was a peculiarly excitable man. He seemed to be merely a bunch of nerves that were at times affected by the shutting of a door, a puff of wind, or the passing of a vehicle, even the falling of a pin. Some people might have called him unpractical and theorist. Perhaps he was a

little of both, but so assuredly he was an earnest and an honest man, who sought for truth in those dark places where most men fear to tread. He had a habit of saying that nature was jealous of her secrets and her mysteries, and would only yield them to him who followed her into the dark by-ways where the common herd never ventured. His enthusiastic researches, however, I saw with alarm, were telling upon his health, and day by day he seemed to grow weaker, so that I begged him to desist, and travel for a short while ; but he was obstinate and refused.

We had for a considerable time been engaged in an experiment that must be nameless ; but it was as daring as it was awful, and he insisted in carrying this experiment to a successful issue, or proving beyond the possibility of doubt that it was useless.

One night, or rather early morning, for it was past midnight, we sat together in his room. It was bitterly cold without, and the wind wailed like a thing in pain. A large log smouldered on the hearthstone, and a shaded lamp threw a soft and mellow light over the floor, but left the upper part of the room in semi-darkness.

For some time we had been sitting silently. while the only external sounds that came to us were that weird wailing of the wind and the slow and measured ticking of a clock. I had noticed with alarm the unusual ghastliness of my friend's face. It was almost as if his soul had gone out of him, and an animated corpse sat in his place. There was a lividness about the face that was appalling, while his eyes were so lustrous and metallic in appearance as to seem unnatural. Unable longer to control myself, I exclaimed :

'Ivan, you are ill ! '

'Hush ! ' he hissed, and his voice was like one who spoke from the tomb—'Hush ! ' he repeated ; 'I feel that we have not worked for nothing. See, see, there—look ! ' he almost screamed, as he pointed one of his long white fingers towards the door.

I turned my eyes and saw the door slowly—slowly—slowly—open. Not a sound came from it, although it was a massive door. Gradually it turned upon its hinges, until it revealed the abysmal blackness of the great hall, and out of that blackness came a ghostly sigh. I was spell-bound, fascinated, and dare not turn my eyes away. I knew, however, that Ivan was on his knees by my side, grasping my wrist with a grip of steel; and, bringing his cold lips to my ear, he whispered:

'Speak not, move not, lest you break the spell.'

But I could not have spoken even had I been inclined; my tongue seemed glued to the roof of my mouth; nor do I think I could have moved, for a spell was on me. Then, from out the darkness I saw a star—a pale blue star—evolved. It floated into the room, and the door closed as slowly, silently and ghostly as it had opened. I was conscious then that my friend had fallen forward on his face, and with a suppressed cry I broke the awful spell that had bound me, and, stooping down, raised him up. He had not swooned, as I thought, and he greeted me with a sad smile.

'It is nothing,' he said faintly, as I helped him to his chair; 'I have been a little excited, and am weak, but shall be better directly. Give me a *petit verre*. That will revive me.'

I poured out a small glass of brandy, and he drank it; then I took some myself, for my nerves were unstrung, and, though I was deadly cold, perspiration was streaming down my face and neck. Under the influence of the liquor, Ivan's strength returned, and the hectic flush lessened the ghastly appearance of his ashen face.

'You saw it?' he asked at last in hoarse tones.

'Yes.'

'Tell me what you saw?' he demanded quickly and with nervous agitation.

'I saw the door open, and I saw a blue star float in,'

'And what did you hear?'

'A sigh, an audible sigh,' I answered.

'My doubts end; my scepticism is removed,' he exclaimed, as he rubbed his hands excitedly together.

I was puzzled to altogether understand his meaning, and I suppose I expressed this in my face, for he said:

'I am talking riddles to you, perhaps; but listen, and I'll explain. I have told you many things about myself, but there is one thing I have not told you. Years ago I loved, and she whom I loved was pure as the unsullied snow and as beautiful as the Madonnas of some of the old painters. Ah! how I loved her, and how she loved me! But soon a hideous disease fastened upon her, and when she lay dying I cursed all things. She bade me seek consolation in prayer, but I laughed the idea to scorn. Then, with unspeakable gentleness, she chided me, and said we should meet in a better world. But I still scoffed. Turning her dying eyes upon me she said with an angelic smile:

'"You are wrong, Ivan, and I will return to you to prove you so."

'They were her last words, and while they still trembled on her lips she died.'

In these few, brief sentences he at once gave me the key to much that had been obscure—that is, obscure to me—and I now understood the strong incentive he had for trying to divine the hidden mysteries of the spirit world.

As he was now thoroughly exhausted I persuaded him to retire, and this he consented to do after exacting a promise from me that I would join him the following night in endeavouring to get some further manifestations.

In accordance with this promise I found myself with him once again, but I was struck, and painfully so, by his altered appearance. The chalky whiteness of his face was emphasised by heavy black shadows under the eyes. He was feeble, too, so that he tottered when he walked. I urged upon him the desirability of having medical advice, but he flouted the very idea. He said that he was jaded with working in his labora-

tory all day, but it was nothing more serious than that; and he added that he had a presentiment something remarkable would happen before the night had grown old. For an hour or so we sat and talked, our subjects of conversation being metaphysical and recondite. Midnight sounded from the old belfry tower, and the brazen dong of the bell came like a shudder through the air. As the last stroke died away in a quivering groan Ivan rose, and said in a low voice, and with an air of mystery:

'The time has come.'

On the table he placed a silver dish half-filled with spirits of wine, and applying a match, there instantly shot up a pale blue, lambent flame. He had previously pulled a screen before the fire, though very little glow came from the smouldering ashes. He now turned down the lamp, so that the darkness was only relieved by the burning spirits. I trembled with suppressed excitement, but I remained silent, watching with strained eyes every movement of my friend. I saw him take from his pocket a small box, and slowly and deliberately sprinkle some powder from the box on to the chafing dish, and instantly there arose a dense, aromatic, luminous vapour that spread itself throughout the room, producing on me, if not on Ivan, a delicious sense of dreamy languor. Suddenly he seized my hand excitedly, and in a hoarse whisper cried:

'Look there!'

He pointed to the velvet curtains which screened his laboratory. Towards them I now turned my eyes, and they were riveted there with fascination, if not with horror, by what they beheld. Standing out distinctly against the darkness of the velvet was a mass of waving nebulous light, that gradually defined itself as a blue star. Then this star expanded and grew, until slowly it assumed a human shape—the shape and features of a young woman of transcendental beauty, but with a look of ineffable sorrow on her young face. Alas! why should it have been sorrow instead of joy?

I felt Ivan's grasp tighten on my arm, and in strange, hollow tones he spoke in my ear :

'Swear to me by all you hold sacred that if I die to-night you will continue the experiments, and in the interests of science you will endeavour to place yourself *en rapport* with my disembodied spirit.'

I turned and looked at him, and shrank away with horror at the ghastliness of his face. Filled with terror, I half rose, intending to summon assistance, but he forced me back into my seat again, and said in the same hollow voice, a voice that had no *timbre*, no resonance in it; it was a voice not of life but death :

'As you love me, as you have an immortal soul, do not move, but swear that you will do what I request!'

Wishing to pacify and calm him, I promised that I would.

'But swear it on your soul!' he said.

'I swear it on my soul,' I answered with a shiver.

'Remember,' he added with awful solemnity, 'the witness to your oath is a spirit from the other world!'

Again I shuddered, and at that moment I saw the spirit-figure slowly raise her white arm and point upward. Then she advanced to Ivan and placed her hand on his shoulder; and at that moment there came to me intuitively the knowledge of why the look of ineffable sadness shrouded that face of unearthly beauty.

A spell was upon me so that I could neither cry out nor move, beyond turning slightly to look at Ivan. At the touch of the spirit he seemed to be suddenly seized with violent convulsions. The sickly, greenish hue of his face deepened. He turned his glowing eyes upon me, then their light suddenly went out, and they were dull, grey, expressionless orbs. He gave a gasp; his head sank on his breast; he slid to the floor, and was dead.

At that instant the spirit-figure lost its outline and identity with the human form—became a mass of nebulous light again

that slowly vanished. As it did so a voice solemn and awful sounded through the room, and said:

'Remember your oath!'

In a few minutes the spell of a strange fascination that had bound me and made me dumb was broken, and I uttered a cry of anguish—a cry that was wrung from me by almost more than mortal suffering.

In my excitement I pulled the bell-cord violently, and, with a crash and a clang, alarmed the household. But nothing could be done. Ivan Vambéry was too surely dead.

The event caused immense excitement in the town, and I was accused of having been instrumental in bringing about his death, and, notwithstanding that a *post mortem* examination revealed that he had died from excitement acting on a weak heart, I was thrown into prison, for a suspect in Russia is shown no mercy by the iniquitous law. For a whole year I languished, and when I asked why I was detained I was told that it was because evidence might yet be forthcoming that I had murdered my friend.

At the end of the year, however, I was set at liberty, and lost no time in leaving the wretched country. I travelled all over the Continent, scarcely staying two days in one place. But my dear Ivan's dying look and the terrible warning voice never left me. Neither travel nor excitement could make me forget them. I grew morbid, melancholy, and ill. My doctors prescribed change of air and scene, but I laughed at them, for they were utterly ignorant of the disease from which I suffered.

Many a time I resolved to make those tests that Ivan and I had been in the habit of making when we wanted spiritual manifestations, but each time my courage failed me, and still the voice sighed in my ear, 'Remember your vow!'

I had now settled down in London, and, unable longer to endure the fearful state of mind, I determined at all hazards to try and call up the spirit of the dead Ivan.

It was a terribly stormy night when I prepared to put my

resolution into practice. The wind fairly shrieked, and the rain dashed violently against my window. I drew my chair to the table and put the lamp out. The fire in the grate had burnt to a dull red. The clock on my chimney-piece marked eleven. For an hour I sat gradually bringing myself into the proper state to receive spiritual manifestations. The glow of the fire had faded, an inky darkness filled the room, the silence was death-like, save that I heard my heart beat. I felt ill, and yet the old horrible fascination kept me at the table. I concentrated my thoughts on Ivan. I desired intensely that his spirit should visit me if it were possible. I silently called him, as it were, from the depths of my being, and the more I longed to have my desire gratified the weaker I grew. At last I would have risen and fled, but could not. I was bound there—chained by invisible chains that would not break and set me free. Half after midnight chimed by the clock. Then I became conscious of a *presence*. It presented no shape to the eye, but I knew *I was not alone*.

Almost involuntarily my lips unclosed, and like a mechanical figure I whispered:

'Ivan Vambéry, are you here?'

A cold wind swept across my face, and I interpreted that as a sign in the affirmative. Then a chill foreboding seized upon me—a foreboding of what I know not. I was the only living thing in the room, and the dead could not harm me. Why then did I fear? Again I answer, I know not. But I experienced that unutterable terror which men experience when they know that between them and Sheol there is, as it were, but a curtain of air.

Gradually as I peered into the darkness there became visible to my aching eyes a small, pale blue light; and as I watched it its outer edges clearly defined themselves into the five radii of a star, and in the centre of that star I saw the livid face and glittering eyes of Ivan Vambéry.

I have a recollection that at the same moment the time-piece proclaimed the hour of one, not with the usual melodious

tinkle, but with a stroke that was like the clanging of the huge clapper of an iron bell. Then the star faded and a blank occurred.

When I awoke from my sleep or swoon, whichever it was, the sunlight was streaming in through my window, for the storm had passed. I felt ill, and I knew by a strange intuition that for me peace had fled for ever. So the years have rolled on, but since that terrible night I have been haunted by the appearance of that star, blue and quivering, and in its centre the awful face of the dead Ivan is immovably fixed.

I have travelled from city to city, from country to country, but cannot escape my fate. In the crowded ball-room, or the busy street; in the sanctuary of the church, or the solitude of my chamber, that blue star framing the ghastly face gleams upon me, and so it will ever gleam until the corruptible and incorruptible are separated, and Psyche, freed from her temple, shall soar to the mystic region that is wisely veiled from the eyes of all, save the most daring and peculiarly constituted men.

IV

THE SPECTRE OF BARROCHAN

In the early autumn of 187– I was called to the Bar, after a long course of study, and at once installed myself in chambers in the Middle Temple, London. Naturally I was full of enthusiasm, and felt proud of being able to at last call myself barrister-at-law. Of course I thought, as all young fellows do, that I had only to write up my name on the lintels of my door for business to flow in ; but equally, of course, I was doomed to disappointment, and weeks rolled away, but never a brief came to me. My parents at this time were residing temporarily at a little paradise of a place called Oneglia, on the Italian Riviera, and with them was my only and idolised sister, Ettie, one of the sweetest, dearest, and most beautiful girls the light of heaven's sun ever shone upon. Ettie and I, being only children, doted upon each other, and between us there was the most perfect confidence and affection. She was a robust, merry, laughing girl, barely twenty years of age, and was destined then, as we all thought, to become a proud and happy wife in the course of a couple of years. She was engaged to be married to a young fellow who had already distinguished himself in the Indian diplomatic service, and was at that time a member of an important Commission that had been sent to the Ameer of Afghanistan. He was the representative of an old south country family, and his people, the Chetwynds, and mine had long been intimately acquainted. Tom Chetwynd had known Ettie from the time they were

children, and long before there was any formal engagement he had regarded her as his future wife. He was five years her senior, and after a distinguished career at college had received an appointment on the staff of Lord ——, then Governor-General of India, and the future seemed to hold for him all that man could desire. He had already been absent two years, and at the expiration of another two years he was to return home, marry my sister, and take her back to India.

To say that Ettie loved him would, after all, be but a conventional way of putting it. As a matter of fact, it would be difficult to convey an adequate idea how deep and all-absorbing that love was. It was not merely an emotional passion; an infatuation that time would subdue or destroy; but love in its most exalted phase. It was love that found its expression in perfect confidence, perfect admiration, and yet it was tempered with a recognition that human nature is full of weakness and flaws, and that after all earthly love, however near it might approach man's standard of perfection, was but a faint foreshadowing of the love which will endure when time shall have become eternity. To Ettie, Tom Chetwynd was a hero, at whose feet she was content to sit in worshipful admiration, and who would ultimately lead her to that everlasting happiness that the world cannot give.

It will be said that this is the dream of every young girl who is engaged to be married. In a certain sense that may be true, for marriage, as viewed by the maiden, is not without its romance. But Ettie's was not merely a romantic dream; sober judgment begot in her rooted conviction. While I was conscious of all this I was no less conscious that Tom idolised and adored my sister. He was clever, brilliant, staunch as steel, and the fear of twenty deaths could not have bought his honour. That was beyond price.

I may, in passing, say my father was a *dilettante*, with ample means to indulge his tastes, and that he had taken my mother to Italy for the benefit of her health. I had promised to join them in December, and stay until the New Year with

them, dear Ettie's last words to me, as the train steamed out of Charing Cross, being:

'Now remember, Jack, you are to spend Christmas with us.'

Then she waved her hand, and her sweet face was a picture of beaming happiness. Alas! little did I think that when next I saw it the smiles and happiness were to be but memories.

My plans for going to Oneglia in December were frustrated by a matter which, from a professional point of view, I could not afford to neglect. It happened that in the course of November a firm of solicitors—old friends of my father—gave me my first brief. It was rather an important civil action in which I had some chance of distinguishing myself, and therefore I was anxious to devote every possible attention to it. The cause dragged on its length through December and was then adjourned for the Christmas holidays; and, though this freed me for a week or ten days, I felt that the time was too short to journey so far as Italy. There was, therefore, nothing for it but to bear my disappointment as best I could.

One evening, just before Christmas, I was sitting in my chambers bewailing the circumstances which prevented my being with my parents and sister at Christmas, for this was the first time in my life I had ever been absent from them at that period of the year, when my friend Archie Campbell was announced. Archie and I had been fellow students and were very much attached. He, like myself, had an only sister to whom he had long been anxious to introduce me, with a view, as he jokingly yet half-seriously put it, 'of making a match.'

'Maggie's a sweet, wee bit thing,' he used to say, 'and you'll fall over head and ears in love with her directly you see her.'

Archie was a clever, bright lad, with a breeziness and freshness about him that reminded one of his own heather-clad hills. As he burst into my room with a cheery laugh

and grasped my hand in his vigorous, honest way, he exclaimed:

'Look here, old fellow, I'm off to Scotland to-morrow to spend Christmas and New Year with my people, and I'm going to drag you down to Barrochan with me. There's no excuse, you know. You can spare a week anyway, and I'm not going to lose this chance of introducing you to Maggie. She's a sonsie bit lass, and, though Barrochan's a gloomy enough place outside, I'll warrant me you'll meet with a thorough good Scotch welcome inside. Besides, we are in the very heart of a fox-hunting country, and you'll be able to get a spin or two.'

'Well, Archie,' I returned, 'it's hard for me to resist the opportunity of making Maggie's acquaintance, but the fact is I must read up during the brief recess, and——'

'Not a bit of it,' he cried; 'I've already written to say I should bring you down, so pray don't disappoint the old folks.'

Need I say I yielded; the fact being I needed but little persuasion, for it would compensate me in some measure for not going to Oneglia; and then I must frankly confess I was desirous of knowing Maggie, for I had seen her photograph, and I thought to myself, 'if she is only half as winsome as her picture indicates, she's worth knowing.'

The result was Archie and I started the following evening, which was Christmas Eve, for the north, and arrived at our destination about noon on Christmas Day. Barrochan was situated between Greenock and Wemyss Bay, and for generations had been in possession of the Campbells. It was a strange, gloomy place. It must have been ghostly and gloomy enough in the summer sunlight, but as I saw it on that cheerless winter day, with the surrounding trees shivering in the icy wind, and the white mists wreathing themselves about it, while the landscape and the sky wore a neutral tint of leaden grey, it looked like the abode of melancholy itself. It was an old, castellated mansion that had been built in the days when

strength of walls was necessary for self-protection. The approach was by a carriage-drive through a dark wood now all dripping and dismal, while the ground was covered with sere and sodden leaves. Then an arched gateway gave entrance to a paved courtyard that was so overshadowed by a giant oak-tree that grew in one corner, that it was inconceivably dismal. The walls were damp, and green with mould and fungus growths. The door was black oak, studded with iron, and sunk deeply in the wall, and was somehow suggestive of the entrance to a sepulchre.

A man-servant had been sent to meet us with a dog-cart, and, as we had arrived somewhat before our time, this ponderous oak-door was closed; nothing seemed to be stirring and the horse's hoofs rattling on the stones seemed to reverberate in strange, hollow echoes. I was deeply impressed with the air of settled gloom that hung over the place, and I must have betrayed this, for, as Archie sprang out of the cart, he said:

'I told you the outside was dismal, but you'll find the inside all right.'

He pulled the chain attached to a large iron bell suspended from an iron stanchion let into the wall, and the clapper clashed and clanged with startling sharpness. In a few moments the door was flung open, and a young girl, with a peal of joyous laughter, bounded down the steps and flung her arms round Archie's neck. Then, remembering that she was in the presence of a stranger, she released him, and stood blushing before me, and my friend at once introduced me to Maggie.

Her photograph had not belied her. In fact it had not done her justice, for it did not depict the mass of bright, wavy, golden hair, the languid, blue eyes, the rosy health-flush in her sweet face, nor the expression of happiness and sweetness that beamed in her countenance. Well might her brother describe her as a 'sonsie lassie.' She was that in its truest sense.

I found myself shaking her hand as if we had been old friends. In fact she said:

'You know I cannot look upon you as a stranger, Mr. Kingsley, for I have heard so much about you from my brother.'

'Nor do I look upon you as a stranger, Miss Maggie,' I returned, 'for Archie has made me well acquainted with you from description, and he has also permitted me to see your photograph, which, however, I may truthfully say, fails to do justice to the original.'

She blushed and laughed, and then led the way into the house, and a servant was at once summoned to show me to my room. It was an oblong room with a panelled ceiling, and oak panelling round the walls. It was lighted by two long, narrow windows, and at one end was a huge fireplace with a ponderous carved oak mantelpiece. Over this hung the full-length portrait of a stern-looking man in the costume of a gentleman of the fifteenth century. Two or three less noticeable portraits hung round the room; and a bull-hide shield and two claymores also hung on one of the panels. The bedstead was a massive four-post, antique piece of furniture, quite in keeping with the dark oak panelling and darker oak floor. The rest of the furniture was all of carved oak and antiquated; nevertheless there was an air of comfort about the place, for a great log burned brightly on the hearthstone, and the snowy linen of the bed and dressing tables relieved the sombreness of the black oak.

When I went downstairs I was ushered into a cheerful room, scarcely less antiquated, however, than my bedroom, and here I was introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, both of them stately and courtly, as became their race and position.

'Our residence will no doubt strike you, Mr. Kingsley, as being somewhat cold and gloomy,' remarked my host with a pronounced northern accent, 'but I venture to say we know how to make our friends welcome and comfortable.'

There were a number of guests besides myself in the house, but I was the only one who could claim no relationship with the family. They were all either aunts, uncles, cousins, half cousins, or cousins six or seven times removed. In spite of my being so utterly a stranger, however, I was soon made to feel perfectly at home by the heartiness of the welcome that was accorded me.

Having got over the first feeling of gloominess with which the strange old building impressed one, at any rate impressed me, I found myself studying the place with keen interest; for I was by instinct an antiquarian, and particularly fond of old buildings; and, further than this, I found myself studying Maggie and, involuntarily as it were, seeking to monopolise her company and conversation. She was bright as a sunbeam, and truly like a sunbeam in this house, relieving the gloom by her ringing laughter and sweet smiles. After dinner she asked me if I would like to see over the mansion, and I at once expressed a very strong desire to do so; 'especially,' I added, 'if you are to be my cicerone.'

She laughed merrily, and away we went up-stairways and down-stairways, along corridors, past angles, through dismal passages, until we gained the western wing of the building, where a large window at the end of a long corridor commanded a magnificent view that stretched away across a deep and well-wooded depression to a skyline of softly-rounded hills. She called my particular attention to this view, saying that they were all very proud of it, and considered it the lion of their house.

After this she led me into a long, narrow, and lofty room, known as the 'Shield Room.' It was oak-lined and oak-floored, with many carved panels, and a very curious chimney-piece, carved with grotesque subjects. A few portraits hung round the walls, together with some shields, a steel breast-plate behind, and pair of steel gauntlets, a number of antlers of deers, and a few old blunderbusses. At the western end of the room was a stained-glass window, and the light falling

through this made a stain on the carpetless floor like a pool of blood. The gloaming was deepening, although a shaft of wild, angry light from the sullen west, where a rack of storm-clouds hung, smote the window, and made that stain on the floor look awfully real. It was about as ghostly a room under the circumstances as one could imagine, and turning to my companion I said jokingly:

'Of course, Miss Maggie, such a house as this is not without its ghost?'

My question, asked thoughtlessly and lightly, had a strange effect upon her. The colour fled from her face; she looked nervous, and glanced hastily about her. Then in a subdued, frightened tone she answered:

'Hush! let us go.'

As I could not then attach any importance to her manner or remark I burst into a laugh, and exclaimed:

'Surely you are not so superstitious as to——'

Then I suddenly checked myself, for the earnestness of her manner and her serious tone commanded my respect, as interrupting me she said:

'Excuse me, Mr. Kingsley, but we Scotch people have a greater faith in the unseen than your countrymen. In my own family there is indisputable record of——' She hesitated, as if reluctant to use the word lest I might laugh, but after a pause continued: 'Why should I not say at once of a spirit having visited us? But its presence in the house is an evil omen—it means death.'

A perceptible shudder passed over her. The shaft of light had been blotted out by the storm-clouds, the crimson stain had faded, and gloom and silence filled the room.

For a moment, but only for a moment, I was disposed to laugh, for I was so utterly without superstition myself, that to hear this clever, intelligent girl talk of the presence of a ghost in the house meaning death seemed to me extravagantly comic. But, as I have said, the desire to laugh was momentary only, for the solemnity and gloominess of the room impressed

me in an unaccountable way, and, seeing she was affected, I offered her my arm, and said:

'Come, let us continue our exploration, Miss Maggie.'

The next few days were very pleasant and happy ones to me, and, short as the time was, I had come to regard Maggie Campbell as something more than a mere acquaintance. She seemed to me to embody all that is delightful in a woman, allied to a keen intelligence and great shrewdness. The weather, which was dry and frosty, if not particularly bright, enabled us to enjoy many pleasant rambles in the grand old woods around Barrochan, and I could not close my eyes to the fact that Archie lost no opportunity to bring me and his sister together. Not that I objected; on the contrary, before the week had gone I began to think I was privileged to consider myself her very intimate friend, if not something nearer than a friend.

Since our visit to the Shield Room on Christmas night I had never alluded to the subject of the so-called spectre, although I had not forgotten it. It had an interest for me in so far as it set me wondering how so intelligent and well-educated a girl as Maggie could have belief in such things. But, as my stay was drawing to a close, I was determined once more to speak of it, in order that I might have a chance of trying to argue her out of what I then considered a nonsensi cal idea. Accordingly I invited her to a stroll one afternoon, and we wandered in what was known as the 'Cover.' It was a stretch of sombre pine wood, so filled with gloom and weirdness that it would have delighted the heart of Dante.

'Miss Maggie,' I began, 'I should really like to know more about this family spectre of yours. And the time and place seem most fitting for you to tell me all about it.'

She looked at me scrutinisingly for some moments as if to assure herself that I was not jesting, and, being satisfied apparently that I was in earnest, she said with something like sadness and solemnity:

'It is a serious matter to us, Mr. Kingsley, whatever you

may think to the contrary. This phantom comes to us or to those we love to warn us or them of death and danger.'

'Do you mean death to those who see it?' I asked, scarcely able to keep my countenance.

'No; but to some one connected with them.'

'Now, supposing,' I said as I drew her gloved hand through my arm—'supposing this phantom, as you call it, were to appear to me, might I take it as a sign that your family—that *you*—regarded me with affection?'

'You are my brother's attached friend,' she answered prevaricatingly, and with averted face; but I saw by her reddened temples that she had not misunderstood me.

'That scarcely answers my question,' I returned. 'But let us dismiss the phantom, and I will frankly tell you that before ever I came here Archie has frequently talked to me of you, and said that you would make a noble wife. He was right, and my desire is to be able in the process of time to look upon Archie as my brother. Do I speak in riddles?'

'No,' she murmured; 'but we have known each other so short a time.'

'True. But, still, Archie and I are very old friends. He knows my people, my position, and something of my affairs. He has told me so much about you that I feel as if I had enjoyed your acquaintance for years instead of days, and I can truthfully declare that you have taken my heart from me.'

Her breath came quickly as, after a pause, she said in low tones:

'But you have another in its place.'

'Yours?' I asked quickly.

'Yes.'

We strolled back to gloomy old Barrochan as lovers, and that night in the smoking-room I said to Archie:

'Well, old boy, I hope our two families will some day be united.'

'Well done! old fellow,' he cried joyfully, slapping me on the back. 'Didn't I tell you that as soon as you saw Maggie

you would fall over head and ears in love with her? Well, she's as bonnie a lass as ever lived, and she'll be a treasure to you, though it's I, her brother, who say it.'

I went to my bedroom that night filled with pleasurable sensations and with many bright hopes for the future. It was a wild night, with a westerly gale blowing round the house, and, putting on my dressing-gown, I drew a large old-fashioned easy chair before the blazing log on the hearth, and took to dreaming about many things. Suddenly I started and turned sharply round, for I could have sworn I heard a sigh. But I saw nothing save the ghostly shadows which the fire-light wrought upon the floor. The fire-light was the only light I had, for I had put the lamp out.

'Upon my word, this eerie old place is making me nervous,' I murmured audibly, as I turned the log over with the poker to produce a greater blaze.

As I once more settled in my chair I again heard that sigh, and so pronounced was it that I started to my feet, and experienced a strange nervous thrill that was totally new to me.

'Pshaw!' I said, 'what absurdity!' and I was annoyed with myself for being startled. But at that instant there was a noise in the room as if a bird was flying about. The sound seemed to travel with great rapidity from side to side, corner to corner, floor to ceiling. When I thought it was above me it came from below; when I thought it was below it came from above. Nothing was visible; there was nothing, so far as I could make out, that would in any way account for this delusion, if delusion it was. The sound was unmistakable, but what produced it? This strange noise from an unseen and unaccountable source was at once the weirdest and most uncanny thing I had ever experienced; and while I stood irresolute, trying to find some solution for the mystery, something icily cold touched me at the back of the neck and caused me to shiver. This new sensation begot in me a sense of nervousness that I had never dreamed myself capable of. I struggled against

the feeling, but could not resist it. I should not like to say that my sensations were altogether those of fear in the sense in which it is understood, but I was conscious of a shrinking within myself, as it were—a shrinking from an invisible something that had no name.

In a few minutes the sounds ceased, and with my mind strangely disturbed I resumed my seat and tried to account by rational laws for what I had heard; and at last I came to the conclusion it was due to some unconscious cerebration. The gloomy building and what Maggie had told me had made an impression all unknown to myself, and now, being alone on a stormy night in a very ghostly sort of room, my nervous system had made my senses victims of an auricular delusion. This was a sophistical mode of reasoning, but it satisfied me for a time, and I think I must have fallen asleep. At any rate I suddenly sprang up with a start. The log had burnt to a handful of glowing charcoal. I felt cold and uneasy, with a sense of impending disaster. I was going to throw off my clothes and get into bed when I started, I may say literally reeled back, for between me and the bed was a luminous figure. In outline only was it suggestive of the human figure, and that figure a woman's. It was enveloped in a gauzy, diaphanous veil, the lower part of which faded away. The arms when I first looked were folded on the breast, but slowly and with indefinable grace one arm was gradually extended and pointed towards me, and with that act all my volition seemed to leave me. In obedience to some strange mesmeric influence I moved mechanically to the door and opened it. Then the figure floated into the corridor, and once more I heard the sigh. Still under the spell I followed. All was silent as the grave, as dark as Erebus, save for the faint, unearthly light emitted by the phantom.

Still floating on it led me through the intricate passages until at last I found myself at the end of that corridor where the window was from which such an enchanting view was obtained. Here the figure vanished, and for some moments

all was gloom, but gradually it seemed to me that over the landscape spread a singular phosphorescent glow that revealed every detail of the landscape, though in a misty dim way. But it wasn't a landscape I knew. There were palm trees, deep jungles, and beyond a sandy plain that stretched to illimitable space, and though it was so far off I saw—for my powers of vision seemed to annihilate distance—a man stretched upon the plain, and above him hovered a flock of vultures. His face was turned upward, and with a cry of horror I recognised it as the face of Tom Chetwynd, my sister's affianced husband. With this recognition all things faded out, and I have no recollection of how I got back to my room. But hours after I found myself on the bed. It was broad daylight. I felt ill, nervous, and out of sorts, and when I had finished my toilet I hurried downstairs. The family had already partaken of breakfast, and I was informed that the servant had knocked on my door three times without obtaining a response.

As soon as ever I could get away, I asked Maggie to have a stroll with me, and when we were alone I turned to her and said:

'Tell me what form does this family spectre of yours take?'

There was no mistaking my earnestness and seriousness, and as the colour faded from her sweet face she answered:

'It generally makes itself heard by sighs, then by a noise like that made by a bird's wing, and, lastly, it reveals itself like a thing of faint luminosity, with some resemblance to a woman.'

I caught her hand excitedly and exclaimed:

'My God! then I have seen it; and it has shown me my sister's affianced husband lying dead upon a sandy plain.'

With a cry of fear Maggie reeled, and would have fallen had I not caught her. But in a few moments she made an effort and recovered herself, and then in pleading and pathetic tones she said:

'Oh, lose not a moment, but hurry to your dear sister and comfort her!'

Filled with a nameless dread, as I was, I could not disregard this injunction. Twenty-four hours had wrought a great change in me, and I no longer scoffed at the incomprehensible.

'I will go,' I replied, as I caught Maggie in my arms and for the first time kissed her. 'You told me that this phantom only appeared to those you loved,' I said. 'Therefore it is a sign that you love me, and that I love you, and our future is bound up together.'

She sighed an assent, and thus, under these strange and weird circumstances, we stood pledged to each other.

Five days later, without any previous announcement, I was in Oneglia. The astonishment of my people may be far better imagined than described. Never before, I thought, had I seen Ettie looking so beautiful, so full of spirits and joyousness. If my awful vision was true, no shadow of the coming sorrow had touched her.

I found considerable difficulty in accounting for my sudden and unexpected arrival. I think I made some lame excuse about not feeling very well, and wanting a change. Next morning a number of letters were handed to my father. I was present at the time. One was addressed in a handwriting that I instantly recognised. It was that of Mrs. Chetwynd. With a sudden impulse and a dire presentiment of coming evil I snatched the letter up, tore it open, and read:

'We are distracted. Brief news has come to us of the death of our beloved son, Tom. We are without details, but so far as is known he was attacked, with some of his party, by a band of marauding natives, and foully murdered. God comfort us all, and God pity dear Ettie! Break the news gently to her.'

As I read this the room seemed to swim round me, and with a low moan I sank on to a sofa.

'What is the matter?' asked my father in alarm.

I handed him the letter, merely remarking:

'I knew it all beforehand. It was revealed to me.'

When we were able to discuss the sad news we decided that Ettie should not be informed for some time. Knowing, as I did, how her life was bound up in Tom, I feared that the news would kill her. A little later I told her with as much joyousness in my tone as I could assume, that since she left England I had become engaged to one of the dearest women heaven ever smiled upon, and I had a particular reason why she should return with me and make Maggie's acquaintance.

Although she thought this precipitancy was totally unlike me, she consented, and we travelled back to London without break of journey. After a day's rest in the Metropolis, during which I visited the Chetwynds, and learned that there was no possible room to doubt the report of dear Tom's death, we left for Barrochan, and in a few hours Ettie and Maggie were together. Then I felt some sense of relief, for only women know how to comfort women when the heart is crushed, and the infinite tenderness and sweetness of Maggie's nature rendered her peculiarly fitted for such a task. In the course of two or three days the girls had taken to each other as if they had been years acquainted. Then one night as we sat in the fire-light in the old dining-room, we gradually and gently told Ettie that in the far-off land of Northern India he for whom she hoped and longed was lying dead.

Gently as we broke the news, the shock was cruel, and for many weeks my beloved sister hovered between life and death. But an angel of pity and goodness tended her in the person of Maggie Campbell, and the infinite love and infinite tenderness of this dear creature nursed her wounded sister back to the things of life, though the joyous spirit and light-heartedness had gone for ever. But when the balmy breath of spring was awakening Nature around Barrochan, Ettie was enabled to wander about with Maggie. She was quiet

and subdued now, for the shadow of a never-ending sorrow was folded about her heart.

'Jack,' she said to me one evening as we strolled in the deepening twilight along the terrace in front of Barrochan, 'for me the world has grown grey, but for you it is full of rich things, and a great joy and infinite peace; and, though I have lost, you have gained.' She took my hand and placed it in that of Maggie's, and then left us.

Years have passed since that evening, and Maggie has long been my wife. Ettie is with us. She is a quiet, thoughtful, subdued woman, actuated by a prayerful earnestness to lessen the sorrow and assuage the anguish of her suffering fellow-beings. Her own sorrow finds no vent in words, but it is written indelibly on her sweet face.

Sometimes my thoughts wander back to that awful night at Barrochan, and I ask myself whether I dreamed a dream or actually saw the phantom. But, whichever it was, the result was the same; and by the timely warning I was enabled to save my dear sister from a shock that might have killed her.

V

THE PIPER OF CULLODEN

On a bold promontory whose base was laved by the waters of the German Ocean stood Drumslie Castle. It was a plain, rambling, solid building, of a nondescript style of architecture, and yet not out of keeping with the situation in which it was placed. Inland was a semicircular sweep of hills, rugged and barren in parts; in others clothed with dense pine forests that seemed to be the abiding places of the spirits of gloom. Between the base of these hills and the Castle was a wild stretch of moorland, over which the sea-birds wheeled in 'darkening flight,' filling the air with their plaintive cries. It was a solitary place in summer, when the broad beams of the sun flung a golden light over the sepia-toned landscape. The drowsy hum of bees, the lowing of kine, the rustling of the marsh sedges, or the cry of birds were about the only sounds one heard. Occasionally a dust-stained pedestrian toiled his way amongst the scrunty heather coming from the hills to the sea, or *vice versa*; or a ragged but picturesque shepherd roamed in dreamy indolence with his browsing flocks. Otherwise all was solitude—a solitude that seemed to lie far, far beyond the fret of the passionate world. But it was also a meeting place for the wanton airs of heaven; and when the storm-wind came across the German Ocean and swept the moorland, it was then a region of desolation, a fitting haunt for things weird and uncanny, and a fostering school for the wild stories and legends current in the district.

Drumslie Castle was hoary with time, for it was built in a far-off age, and had had a strange and chequered career. But soon after the fatal fight of Culloden it passed into the possession of the family of Linning, for services rendered to the English Government under the Duke of Cumberland. In connection with the Castle was a considerable rent-roll derived from property in and about the town, which nestled in a deep depression that sloped down to the sea, two miles away. This town was a thriving, busy place; but, owing to its situation in a hollow, it was entirely hidden from the moorland, a thin veil of smoke alone indicating its presence to the traveller over the moor. A well-kept road that was carried along the edge of the cliffs connected the town and the Castle, which, at the time we are writing of, was in possession of Sir Archibald Linning, a lineal descendant of the Sir John Linning who had fought under Cumberland at Culloden.

Sir Archibald was not an old man; indeed, he was some years under fifty, but he was grizzled and careworn, with a look of pained anxiety in his face. He had married somewhat early in life, and his lady had borne him a goodly number of sons and daughters. But he had seen them taken from him one by one, nearly all by violent, mysterious, or sudden death; for a curse rested upon the house of Linning. Now we find Sir Archibald old before his time, and a widower with only one daughter, Jessie.

The Linnings had ever been noted for their beauty. Tradition had it that an ugly woman or a mis-shapen man had never been known in the family. And certainly, as far as Jessie was concerned, this tradition appeared to receive verification. Cast in a mould that might without exaggeration be called perfection, and with a face full of that feminine softness and sweetness beloved of the old painters, she was a woman who would have tempted 'Good St. Anthony' himself to his fall; and allied to this physical perfection was a gentleness of disposition and a generous nature, open, frank, and honest. She had from her earliest years enjoyed the best of

health, for the Linnings were famed for robustness no less than beauty, and now, having reached the age of twenty-three, it appeared as if she was destined to long life, and to become the founder of a new branch of the Linning family. On her, indeed, her father had set his last earthly hopes. To her he looked to perpetuate his race, and he had prayed with an earnestness begotten of wild despair that heaven would spare this girl, and that the curse which had all but annihilated his people might now end. For a considerable time she had been residing with some distant relatives in London, and while there had been introduced to Roland Staffler, himself a doctor, and second son of the world-renowned surgeon, Sir Joseph Staffler. Almost at the first time of seeing each other they fell in love; and in every way they seemed singularly fitted to journey together through life.

When Sir Archibald heard of the love-making he was truly glad; for, though he had no personal acquaintance at that time with the Stafflers, he knew they were people beyond reproach, and no less renowned for their chivalry and honour than for their cleverness. Great was his joy therefore at the prospect of a union between his house and the Stafflers, as by it he hoped that his own house would be saved.

For six months the course of the wooing ran on smoothly and happily, and at last Jessie returned to her home to make preparations for her marriage.

Up to this period Sir Archibald had not seen his future son-in-law; but it was arranged that before the summer had waned Roland was to visit Drumslie Castle, and be Sir Archibald's guest for at least a couple of months. Professional duties, however, kept the young doctor from fulfilling his engagement until the summer had passed, and he arrived at Drumslie one sombre afternoon towards the end of October.

Had he been by nature prone to receive gloomy impressions from external objects, he could not have failed to be affected as he drove up to the ancient Castle; for, turn which

way the eye would, there was not an atom of colour to relieve the monotint of grey. The grey sea blended with the grey sky, and the grey moorland lost itself in the grey, mist swept hills beyond. The only thing that did tend to break the monotony of tone was the bog cotton, which flashed out in white patches here and there on the moor. From somewhere out of the misty distance came the mournful bleat of a sheep now and then, and this was varied by the bay of the heath-cock or the lonely whew of the plover. The infinite dolefulness of the scene was accentuated by the leaden sky, that seemed to spread over the vast land and seascape like a funeral pall. From the sea itself came a sullen boom as it rose and fell with rhythmical monotony against the iron cliffs.

Sir Archibald met the doctor in the entrance hall, and, taking both his hands, gave him a warm welcome, saying with a smile that had something of the sadness of the external landscape in it:

'Right glad I am to see you, and I give you a treble welcome as my hoped-for son. I trust that you may bring joy, and peace, and happiness to my house.'

'I hope so, sir,' answered the doctor with a hearty laugh, 'as I shall take peace, and joy, and happiness from it.'

The latter part of this answer, as will be readily seen, was capable of being contorted into a meaning totally different to that intended by the speaker, and some such interpretation as this must have occurred to Sir Archibald, for he raised his shoulders with a shudder, and said mournfully:

'Heaven forbid that you should take joy and happiness from my desolated home!' Then, as if suddenly remembering himself, he laughed and added quickly: 'But come, I must not talk like this now. Jessie is eager to see you, and the servant will at once conduct you to your apartment, so that you may change your travelling dress, by which time dinner will be served.'

The doctor failed to notice in his host's face the settled

gloom which was there; he was too full of thoughts of his lady love, and hastened to his room with a light heart.

The days sped merrily with the young couple, who were too much absorbed in each other to interest themselves in anything else. Jessie, of course, was not ignorant of the curse which was said to rest upon her house; nor that she was the last prop of that house. But the prospect of joy in the near future caused her for the time to forget the sorrow and the pain of the past. Not so her father. He could not conceal his anxiety lest even at the eleventh hour his new-born hopes should be blighted, as they had ever been blighted throughout his life. But as day after day went by, and he watched his daughter and her affianced husband, as he saw how infinitely tender he was to her, and how she with all her woman's nature adored him, he began to think that at last the sorrow had ended. But alas! this illusive dream was to be of short duration.

It chanced one evening that he and Doctor Staffler were seated together in the library, Jessie being engaged in superintending preparations for a party on the following day—a number of friends and acquaintances having been invited to meet the doctor.

It had been a singularly sullen day, and the sea boomed with angry menace, while the wind had moaned dismally over the moorland. As the darkness gathered, there was a wild streak of blood-red light in the west, where the heavy clouds were banked up over the hills. Sir Archibald had predicted a stormy night, and with the deepening gloom the boom of the sea grew hoarser, and great splashes of rain were driven against the windows. The library, however, was cheerful enough. A sea-coal fire blazed brightly, and its ruddy gleams warmed the dark oak of the panelling, and added colour to the bindings of the many volumes in the well-filled bookcases. The windows, which faced seaward, were screened with massive crimson velvet curtains, and a heavy dark red pile carpet covered the floor. Outside the storm

had gathered in fury, and blowing in from the ocean the wind brought squalls of hail and rain that beat with extraordinary force against the window. But Sir Archibald was unusually cheerful, for he and the doctor had been discussing the approaching marriage, and settling certain weighty matters indispensable to the union of two important families. There had come a lull in the conversation, when suddenly the doctor started up in an attitude of listening.

'What is it?' asked his host quickly as he noticed this.

'Well, I could almost have sworn that I heard the sound of bagpipes swelling and dying down on the wind.'

With a cry that was a wail of abject despair Sir Archibald sank back in his chair; his chin fell on his breast, and his face assumed a hue that was literally ashen in its tone.

Thinking that he had been seized with a fit of apoplexy the doctor sprang to him, grasped his wrist to feel the pulse, and in a voice of anxiety asked him what was the matter.

'The bagpipes! the bagpipes!' gasped Sir Archibald, whilst his eyes had a wild, staring expression in them.

'But surely the sound of bagpipes needn't disturb you like this,' the doctor remarked, naturally greatly surprised.

'It's the Piper of Culloden!' gasped Sir Archibald hoarsely.

'Well, really, sir, this requires some explanation,' said the doctor with a puzzled air.

'You shall have it! you shall have it!' groaned the afflicted man as he covered his face with his hands and shuddered visibly. 'But go to your seat! go to your seat!'

Dr. Staffler went back to his chair, and for some minutes there was silence in the room; and then could be heard, coming and going, with the wind, the sound of bagpipes, now wailing plaintively, now swelling to a warlike pibroch, and anon scraughing fiercely; and yet there was something unnatural in the sounds. It is difficult to say in what way this

made itself manifest, but that it did so was proved by the doctor saying rather to himself than as if speaking to his companion:

'There is something awfully weird about that music.'

'My God, yes!' exclaimed Sir Archibald, clasping his hands in an agony of despair; 'awfully weird, because it means death to a member of my house.'

The doctor looked incredulous, and even smiled, for he was utterly without superstition.

'Surely,' he remarked, 'such an idea as that is unworthy a man of your intelligence.'

A laugh of fear escaped from the white lips of Sir Archibald as he replied:

'You will not say that when I have told you the meaning of those awful sounds.' Then he suddenly sprang from his seat, and seizing the doctor's hand almost roughly he exclaimed: 'Come here!' at the same time drawing him towards an ante-room, and lifting a lamp from the table. The door of the ante-room was screened by a curtain, and letting go the doctor's hand he pulled this curtain on one side and entered. He raised the lamp above his head so that its rays fell full on the portrait of a soldier in costume of the early part of the seventeenth century.

'That man,' he said fiercely, 'was an ancestor of mine. He was a captain under the Duke of Cumberland, and fought at Culloden. It was through him that this curse came upon our house.'

He uttered a groan as he said this, and passed hurriedly out of the room again as if the sight of the portrait was hateful to him. Once more he threw himself into his chair and covering his face groaned in anguish.

The doctor, who had followed him, began seriously to think that his host was not in his right mind, and he said persuasively:

'Perhaps I had better summon some of the servants, who will assist you to your bedroom, where I will visit you, and if

you will permit me I will prescribe something that will have the effect of soothing your nerves.'

Sir Archibald looked up. His face was haggard and ghastly. His eyes were expressive of intense mental distress, and when he spoke his voice was hoarse as a raven's.

'Keep your seat,' he said. 'You are wrong in your diagnosis; for me those dreadful sounds which you yourself have heard are fraught with an awful meaning, and it is only right that I, as a man of honour, should tell you what that meaning is. You see me a desolate old man—old before my time. One by one my beloved children have been taken from me in the prime and flush of life, and not from fell disease, but while apparently in vigorous health; and always before the death of one of my children the sounds of those awful pipes have been heard.'

The doctor himself grew a little pale at these words in spite of himself, for, if they were not the mere ravings of a mind distraught, they meant that his bride-elect was doomed. It was a dreadful thought; and then, as if ashamed and even angry with himself, he laughed a scornful little laugh, and ejaculated the one word:

'Absurd!'

'You are sceptical,' said Sir Archibald in the same hollow tone. 'But, heaven pity us! it is too true—too true. My ancestor whose portrait you have just looked upon was a soldier of great bravery, but a fierce and passionate man. It is said that in his passion he was capable of almost any cruelty. On that fatal day of Culloden he held a commission in Monro's regiment, and it is stated that he fought with lion-like bravery. When the dreadful charge of the wild, rushing Highlanders was over, when all that despair and devotion could do for the misguided Prince Charlie was seen to be of no avail, his beaten remnant of an army began to fall back sullenly, though even as they retired they contested the ground inch by inch, and in many cases pouring out their life-blood rather than own defeat. My ancestor was one of the most active

and determined in following up the slowly-retreating Highlandmen, and all reports concur in saying that he was relentless to those who would not readily yield. On one part of the field lay a wounded piper. One of his legs had been shattered by a cannon ball, so that he was helpless. His pipes were beside him, and he was stretched on his back writhing with pain. A little group of his ragged countrymen were slowly falling back before a superior number of the English, who were led by my ancestor. Suddenly the dying piper rose, and, seizing his instrument, he blew a wild war strain to encourage his kin against the hated oe. The sound of the pipes so inspirited the flying column that they suddenly turned with savage fury on their pursuers, and for some minutes a bloody hand-to-hand encounter ensued, and many an Englishman bit the dust.

'"Cease that cursed row," roared my ancestor to the wounded piper; but the man, all unheeding, played louder and more fiercely.

'Such an unequal struggle could not last long, for the Englishmen outnumbered the Scots two to one. At last the remnant of the latter turned and fled. Then, wild with passion, as he saw how many of his men had fallen in that short scrimmage that had been brought about by the pibroch of the wounded piper, my ancestor rushed upon him, and crying out, "Thou accursed fool!" he plunged his sword through the man's body. But the Highlander was not killed outright, and, raising himself on his elbow as the blood gushed in a stream from his wound, he retorted:

'"Accursed be thou and all thy tribe to the fourth generation! Thy descendants shall die in their shoes, and while the bloom of youth and health is upon them. My pipes shall announce their doom, and whenever the pibroch sounds in their ears Death shall be stretching his hands towards them. Again I say accursed, thrice accursed, be thou and thine and thy descendants to the fourth generation."

'In his fierce wrath the piper almost sprang to his feet,

and, as if to emphasise his dying hatred, he spat in my ancestor's face, and then blew a wild skirl on his pipes. But it was his last act, for the next moment he was brained, and fell back dead, and then my ancestor hacked the offending pipes to pieces with his sword.

'Such, then, is the story; and the curse of the dying piper has been too literally fulfilled. I have heard that unearthly music often, and whenever I have heard it I have seen one of my loved ones taken from me.'

Sir Archibald had told this strange story in a quick, jerky, nervous way. His eyes depicted terror, and his face was like the face of a corpse.

Doctor Staffler was naturally much affected, although he did not attach any serious importance to what he had heard; or rather, it should be said, he tried not to do so, but in spite of himself an uneasy feeling forced itself upon him. There was no mistake about his having heard the pipes, but he asked himself whether his ears had not been befooled; or, if that was not the case, whether the music he had heard had not been played by a living man.

He succeeded in persuading his host to go to bed, where he administered to him a sleeping draught, and the next morning when Sir Archibald arose he was much refreshed, although gloomy and despondent.

A fortnight passed, and Doctor Staffler began to laugh at the fears he had allowed to take possession of him on that stormy night when he had heard the so-called Piper of Culloden. Jessie had not been told of the incident, and the young couple were very happy in their love. The doctor was proud of his affianced wife, and was never tired of praising her beauty. For beautiful she was, and to his eyes her beauty was without parallel.

But while the young people were thus dreaming their dreams of future joy and happiness, Sir Archibald was filled with nervous anxiety, so that his haggard face had become still more haggard *He* could not forget the warning; but

what he hoped and prayed was that the warning might be meant for himself, not for his child. He was a worn man, to whom life had proved very bitter, and he would have no difficulty in yielding it up. But it was torture to him to think that his idolised child was doomed. She *was* so beautiful, so full of health and hope; and so supremely happy at the prospect of becoming the wife of the man she worshipped.

It wanted now but three weeks to the marriage, which was to take place in London, and the doctor, Sir Archibald, and his daughter were to leave for the South in the course of a few days. Jessie was in high spirits, and busy with preparations for her departure from her home and for her marriage.

Once again the doctor and his host were alone in the library. It was a beautiful night, calm, cold, and clear. The stars in frosty splendour burned, and a nearly full moon silvered the sleeping sea. Sir Archibald drew back the curtain from the window in order that the doctor might gaze upon the superb scene that, while beautiful, looked almost unearthly under the moonlight. Suddenly there arose on the gentle air that came in from the sea the sound of bagpipes—not a fierce pibroch this time, but a low, plaintive, melancholy wail, that seemed to be softened and subdued by distance, so faint were the sounds. Sir Archibald let the curtain fall, and, staggering backwards to his chair, he gasped:

'The pipes! the pipes! The curse is still on us.'

The doctor tried to soothe him, saying:

'Really, sir, I think you should not let this matter affect you so much.'

Sir Archibald turned his eyes upon the doctor with a look of despair and reproach, but he made no response. Then he sank back in his chair and seemed to be wrapped in gloomy thought.

The doctor took down a book, and seating himself began to read, although he found that he could not concentrate his mind upon the page, but his thoughts would wander to the

strange story his host had told him about the Piper of Culloden.

Presently Jessie came into the room. She was looking a little pale, and her lover's perception and anxiety being quickened by what he had heard, he asked:

'Are you not well, Jess?'

'Oh yes, dear. Well, that is, I have been suffering from a slight headache,' she answered with a smile.

'Oh, I will soon give you something to relieve that,' said the doctor, rising from his seat.

'I've already taken something,' she answered, laying her soft white hand on his.

'Have you? What have you taken?'

'Well, your little medicine case that you were showing me the other day was on the dining-room sideboard, and I helped myself to some sal volatile.'

'And has it done you good?' asked the doctor.

'Not yet. There has hardly been time.'

The doctor drew a chair near the fire for her, and, seating himself beside her, began to discuss the merits of certain musical composers, for they were both very fond of music. And while he talked she grew paler, and seemed to become abstracted, and presently she said faintly:

'Roland, I feel very queer. There is something the matter with me.'

With those words Sir Archibald uttered a cry of woe, and swooned away.

The servants were summoned, and he was put to bed, and in wild alarm the doctor plied his sweetheart with questions as to her symptoms.

'I have a strange numbness of the lips,' she answered, 'and I feel pain——'

That statement made him turn giddy and almost reel, for the distinct and characteristic symptom—numbness of the lips—pointed to poisoning with aconite, of which he knew he had a small phial in his case. He rushed into the dining-room,

examined the case, and found that the aconite bottle was half empty. By mistake the poor girl had taken the poison for the sal volatile. Gradually she grew worse, and servants were started off post haste to obtain the services of other doctors, and all through that dreadful night Roland Staffler, almost distracted with grief, did everything that human skill and science could suggest, in conjunction with colleagues from far and near, but all was of no avail. The dreadful poison had got too firm a hold, and, as the eastern light of morn spread itself over the still sleeping sea, the beautiful Jessie Linning, in a fit of wild delirium, passed into the land of shadows.

Crushed into the very dust with an unutterable sorrow, the poor young doctor bowed his head over the body of her he had loved so well, and felt that henceforth his life must be a broken life, a life of gloom. He had at first brought joy and peace and happiness to that accursed place; but now, alas! through inadvertence he had taken peace and joy and happiness away, in a different sense from what he had hoped for.

Sir Archibald Linning never recovered from the blow, but three months afterwards he followed his daughter to the grave, and the night before he died the wailing music of the pipes of the Piper of Culloden came breathing over the sea.

The curse has been truly fulfilled. The last of the Linnings is extinct. Drumslie Castle has fallen into a roofless ruin, the owl hoots through its silent chambers, and the ravens build their nests in the adjoining trees. Roland Staffler has gained eminence in his profession, and his name is known far and wide as a scientific man. But since that fatal night when Jessie Linning, his affianced bride, was poisoned at Drumslie Castle, he has never been known to smile. His life has indeed been a broken life, through that curse uttered long ago by the dying Piper of Culloden.

VI

SOME EXPERIMENTS WITH A HEAD

BEING A RECORD FROM THE PAPERS OF A LATE PHYSICIAN

THE following notes have reference to a time, now far off, alas! when I was a very young man, and imbued with an unquenchable desire for knowledge. I was an enthusiast, I freely admit; and there were some who called me a dreamer; but, if that is to be interpreted as meaning a visionary, I decline to admit that the term was applicable. I had a profound love of science in all its branches, and in those fields of research which the scientist must conscientiously explore if he wishes to be accepted as a trustworthy guide, I diligently sought for demonstrable facts. Scientists may be divided into two very distinct classes, your men of theory and your men of practice. I preferred to fall into the latter category, and asked for proof of all that was advanced. It was this very trait in my character which led to the extraordinary incidents related in this paper.

Let me at once state that at the time to which I refer I was a medical student, studying at the College de France in Paris. My father before me had been an eminent member of the medical profession, and from the very earliest period of my existence I evinced a strong desire to follow in his footsteps. The consequence was that, by the time I was twenty, I was studying hard in the French capital. I had already passed several examinations with flying colours, and was look-

ing forward to obtaining my diploma within the next two years.

Now, there was one subject that had always possessed for me almost fascinating interest, and I am free to confess that it absorbed a very great deal of my attention. It was whether in cases of decapitation death was instantaneous. My professional brethren will know that opinions on the subject have been much divided, but 'instantaneous' is an elastic term. The coming and going of a flash of lightning is said to be instantaneous, and yet it occupies an appreciable space of time that is capable of being accurately measured. Now, the question that suggested itself to my mind was whether though life was extinguished in a space of time no longer than a flash of lightning takes to manifest itself, that is, in the blinking of an eye, there was still time for introspection, retrospection, and speculation? I was fully aware that the point involved was a peculiarly delicate one, and might be said to belong more to the domain of psychology rather than physiology. But in considering the subject one could not ignore the experiences of those who had come within an ace of losing their lives by drowning. In well-authenticated instances the drowning person had in an incredibly brief space of time traversed the whole record of his life; had recalled incidents of childhood long ago forgotten, and had even worked out speculatively what his friends would think of his death, how his affairs would be settled, and what would be the careers of his children —if he had any—in the far-off future. In such brief moments the mind is capable of grasping an extraordinary range of subjects, past, present, and to come; and yet the duration of consciousness in such cases can hardly exceed, in the extremest limit, five minutes.

In dwelling upon these facts I asked myself whether the brain of a decapitated person was not capable of thought for a period as correspondingly long as that experienced by a drowning man. I was, of course, aware that some of the most eminent anatomists affirmed that the entire severance

of the jugular vein, the carotid arteries, especially the internal carotid supplying the brain with blood, and the spinal cord (or main nerve track of the body), must produce absolutely instantaneous death. But I had the boldness to answer to this that 'instantaneousness' was capable of being measured as a space of time, and such a space of time, to a dying man, was filled with potentialities that could not be ignored by the inquirer who had a due regard for minutiæ. Nor could I forget the well authenticated case of an unfortunate victim of the Reign of Terror, whose head was seized by the executioner as soon as the guillotine had severed it, and as the man was in the act of holding it up by the hair to the view of the crowd he saw the eyes turn upon him with such a look of anguish and unspeakable reproach that, with a cry of horror, he let the head fall and fled.

The professorial chair of anatomy in the College was filled by the celebrated Doctor François Grassard, who had been a friend of my father, and took a great interest in me. He was pleased at times to discuss my favourite subject with me, but his opinion was that cessation of thought and power of reflection was absolutely coincident with the severance of the neck, which, as every one knows, in the case of the guillotine is as quick as the blinking of the eye. But then I took my stand upon that elasticity of the term instantaneous, and which, as I have already urged, while counting for nothing in an ordinary way, might be much to a dying person, that is, a person dying by sudden and violent means.

On one occasion, after an argument with Doctor Grassard, I ventured to suggest that it might be possible to make some practical experiments with a view to substantiating or disproving my argument. The doctor reflected for a little time, and then said:

'Yes, I think it is possible, and such experiments can hardly fail to be deeply interesting, and even scientifically valuable.'

It was not until nearly a year after this that the opportu-

nity for the suggested experiments occurred. It happened that about this time Paris was startled by a wholesale butchery of a peculiarly atrocious character. In one of the wretched dens of the Rue des Cascades a man named Gaspard Thurreau hacked his wife, his mistress, and four children to pieces. The Rue des Cascades is situated in the neighbourhood of St. Denis, which is perhaps one of the foulest spots to be found in any city in the world.

It is not necessary to dwell upon the details of the crime, which, however, were peculiarly horrible even for Paris; but the criminal himself was altogether a most remarkable man. He had formerly been an analytical chemist, and was a man of high intellectual attainments. In direct opposition, however, to the wishes of his friends and relations, he married a woman much below him in social rank and one of very indifferent character. Such a mésalliance was, of course, bound to bring misery and unhappiness. Madame Thurreau had a violent temper and a most jealous disposition. The result was, the ill-matched couple led a cat and dog life for years. At first the man struggled against his misfortunes; then he gave way to drink, and that brought the inevitable concomitant train of evils. He lost his position, his business, his honour; went from bad to worse; was deserted by all his relations; committed forgery, and served a long term of imprisonment. On his release, he sank down to the lowest stratum of society, and, together with his wife and four children, found shelter in the dreadful Alsatia of St. Denis. Here he formed a *liaison* with a woman who lived under the same roof. For a time the wife tolerated her rival, then the two women began to fight like wild cats until the feud ended in the awful tragedy. Thurreau, inflamed with wine, went to his den one night, when both the women reviled and reproached him until, excited into a fit of frenzy, he slew them and his children.

His history, such as I have sketched it in outline, was gradually unfolded at the trial, and, although he found some sympathisers, the weight of public opinion was decidedly

against him. There never was from the first a shadow of a doubt about his being the culprit. The only question was whether, to their verdict, the jury could not append the 'extenuating circumstances' of which French juries are so fond, and which invariably saves the murderer's head. But Thurreau's crime was so revolting and barbarous that the 'extenuating circumstances' were left out, and the criminal was condemned to death without hope of reprieve. As soon as Doctor Grassard heard of the sentence, he said to me :

'Well, young gentleman, I think we shall at last be able to try our experiments, and, what is more, we shall have an unusually good subject.'

I knew what he meant by 'an unusually good subject.' Thurreau was a man of striking physical mould. From an anatomical point of view he was perfect, with a well-shaped head, firmly set on massive shoulders. He was under forty, and had never had any disease, so that in such a man vitality would be very strong, and there would be a corresponding tenacity of life. Apart from sheer physical attributes he was endowed with a keen intelligence and mental powers of a high order, though he had shown himself weak in one respect—that was in his inability to rise superior to his misfortunes.

Doctor Grassard's position as one of the first anatomists in France gave him great influence, so that he had no difficulty in obtaining permission from the authorities to visit the condemned man. He found Thurreau callous as to his fate, and holding views with regard to a future state which rendered him deaf to the voice of spiritual consolation. As a matter of fact, he absolutely and determinedly refused to receive the prison or any other chaplain, though a day or two before his execution he so far relented as to consent to see a priest, to whom he made confession.

It will be readily comprehended in what respects such a man was about as good a subject as could have been selected for our purpose. With tact and delicacy, Doctor Grassard led up to the purpose that had induced him to visit him ;

telling him that in the interest of science it was desired to make certain tests, with a view to endeavour to establish the precise moment when the death of the brain ensued after decapitation. With a grim smile Thurreau said that as a chief actor in the experiments, he was perfectly willing to do all that he possibly could to further the ends of science. But he wanted to know what part he was to play after he was beheaded. He was told that what was desired of him was that at the moment when he was laid upon the plank with his neck under the knife, he should concentrate all his thoughts upon four questions that would be spoken into his ear. These questions were:

1. Are you in pain?
2. Do you recognise those about you?
3. Do you remember what you have been guillotined for?
4. Are you happy?

The affirmative answer to these questions was to be a single blink of the eyelids, the negative two. Now, if consciousness remained for any appreciable space of time, there was no reason why this motion of the eyelids should not be made, because the *palpebræ* or eyelids are dependent for their action on certain muscles known as the *orbicular* or circular muscles and the *levators*, *palpebræ superiores*, the muscles used to raise the upper eyelids, which would be quite uninjured structurally. The same remark applies to the muscles of the eye known as the *recti*, which are six in number, so that the eye might also be moved if the will was there. On that the whole question turned. *Would* the will be there? By will I mean consciousness. These preliminaries having been settled, it now remained to make arrangements for carrying the experiments out, and in this we were aided in every possible way by the authorities, the matter, of course, being kept strictly secret. In discussing these arrangements with Professor Grassard I took the liberty to express myself to the effect that if the brain could be kept at its normal temperature by the blood, consciousness might be retained for many seconds if not minutes, and what we had

to consider was how to prevent the tremendous drain of the vital fluid as soon as the severance was accomplished. Naturally, with the cutting through of the great veins and arteries the blood flowed away as water would flow from a reservoir if the banks were to burst, and what we had to do was to dam this flow. After some consideration Professor Grassard suggested that by plunging the bleeding surface into a basin of softened wax the end aimed at would be attained.

The month was November, and the morning of the execution was as dismal as could be imagined. All night long a drizzling rain had been falling, and a searching, biting wind made the streets unbearable. To this fact, no doubt, was due the comparatively small crowd that had assembled in the Place de la Roquette, where the guillotine was erected. The hideous machine of death had been placed within three yards of the door of the prison through which its victim would have to pass on this his last journey. A corridor had been formed from the door to the steps of the guillotine by putting up a canvas screen on each side. This had been done for our special convenience. It had also been arranged that, instead of the basket which was to receive the head being placed on the scaffold in the usual way, some of the planks were cut, forming, as it were, a trap door, the basket being on the ground under the trap. Consequently, after the execution the head could be taken out without the spectators having any knowledge of what was being done. The authorities were also good enough to place at our disposal an ante-room just inside of the corridor of the prison, so that we had no difficulty whatever in completing our preparations, and being quite ready for the exciting moment.

As is well known, culprits condemned to death in France are never informed of the day of their execution until the very morning, and only then about an hour before the time. It was six o'clock when the prefect, the governor of the prison, various officials, and a priest entered Thurreau's cell, and, arousing him from a sound sleep, informed him that he had

but an hour to live. The wretched man received the announcement with the most perfect *sang froid*. Then turning to the priest, who had approached him with a crucifix, he bowed, and said, politely but firmly:

'Monsieur, pardon me if I say I can dispense with your services. I have never attempted to deny that I committed the crime, and now in this supreme hour, in your presence and the presence of these gentlemen, I confess that my hand, and my hand alone, killed the women and the children. I am perfectly aware that by the laws of my country my life is forfeited, and the perfect justness of my sentence I freely admit. But if such crimes as mine are to be visited with the wrath of heaven, I cannot hope to turn aside that wrath by a hurried prayer now that I am all but dead. Therefore, monsieur, I pray that you will leave me to my own reflections during the brief time left to me, for, as a matter of fact, I have pledged myself, so far as I can, to aid certain experiments that Professor Grassard is desirous of carrying out.'

This speech at such a time will show that the culprit was no ordinary man. The priest, however, did not retire, but remained with the prisoner and accompanied him to the scaffold, and there Thurreau consented to press his lips to the crucifix that the good priest extended to him.

As soon as ever the mournful procession had passed through the doorway, one of our hospital assistants followed with a tin bowl half full of heated wax. A cordon of gendarmes was drawn round the guillotine, and beyond them, again, was a double line of mounted soldiers, so that the crowds of people were kept a long way off.

Exactly three minutes after Thurreau had crossed the threshold of the door he was lying on the plank. Daylight had scarcely yet begun to assert itself. From the murky sky the drizzling rain still descended, and away to the east there was an angry flush of red. The boom of the bell of Notre Dame, as it slowly tolled the hour of seven, fell on our ears as the gleaming and fatal knife flashed down the wooden

uprights in which it worked, and Thurreau's head fell into the basket on the pavement. With extraordinary dexterity and coolness the assistant caught it up, and set it with the neck downwards in the basin of wax, and then with agile movement he rushed into the room where we waited for him. The face of the culprit was then perfectly natural in its colour and expression, but we noted that there was a slight twitching of the muscles of the mouth.

The basin was set on a table all ready prepared, and in the full rays of a strong light. Then the Professor placed his lips close to the right ear, and in a clear, deliberate, resonant voice asked :

'Are you in pain ?'

Instantly there were two distinct blinks of the eyelids.

'Do you recognise those about you ?' was next asked.

This time there was one blink.

'Do you remember what you have been guillotined for ?'

One blink again, but now the muscular motion of the eyelid was perceptibly slower.

The last question was then put :

'Are you happy ?'

With the utterance of the word 'happy,' Professor Grassard straightened himself up, and instantly the eyes, which were full open, and also quite natural in colour and expression, turned upon him. The effect of this was thrilling, and certainly would have unnerved men who had not been braced up by an enthusiastic love for science. The Professor moved round the table slowly, describing the segment of a circle in his movement, and as he did so the eyes followed him. Then suddenly we saw a film come over them, and the lids drooped, while the face assumed a bluish white tint, and there was a dropping of the lower jaw.

From the time that the head was taken out of the basket to this change setting in, exactly three minutes eight seconds had elapsed, as measured by a chronometer watch, so that there was consciousness of the brain for that period after the

head was severed from the body. The proofs of this were beyond all question of possible doubt. It may of course be stated with positiveness that this in a great measure, if not entirely so, was due to the hermetically sealing of the ends of the cut vessels by means of the wax. We regretted exceedingly that an answer by the sign of negation or affirmation, which had been agreed upon, had not been given to question number four. It seemed probable that the question was understood, but instead of the motion of the eyelid, the eyes themselves turned, following the movements of the Professor, and on discussing this subsequently we came to the conclusion that it was due to Doctor Grassard rising from the bent position he had assumed while speaking into the ear, and naturally he regretted that he had altered his position so quickly. The change in the face that then set in was probably due to the congesting of the sinuses, which would at once deprive the brain of all sensibility. In other words, the brain there and then died. This was the conclusion we arrived at, but nevertheless we resolved to try what effect an electric current might have, though we were actuated more by curiosity than any absolute idea of results.

We had provided ourselves with a small battery, and, laying bare the *ganglion cervicale superius*, a nerve centre in the neck, we sent a current through it, but the only effect produced was some twitching of the nerves of the face. We therefore made a deep incision down on to the optic nerve behind the eye, and connecting the nerve with the positive pole of the battery, while the negative pole was applied to the base of the anterior lobe of the brain, we turned on the current. In a few seconds the face seemed to lose its bluish, waxen appearance, and become suffused with a warm flush as in life ; the eyes lost their glassiness, and the eyelids their droop.

As we watched these phenomena with breathless interest we saw with amazement the eyes move in a perfectly natural way from right to left and left to right. Then Professor Grassard drew with his finger an imaginary line on a parallel

axis to the eyes of the head, and the eyes slowly followed the motion of the finger.

Speaking for myself, I confess to being positively startled by this unlooked-for result; for anything more weird or awful than the bodiless head rolling its eyes in counterfeit presentment of actual life could hardly be imagined by brain of man. But the climax had not yet been reached; for the next moment the Professor brought his lips on a line with the right ear of the head, and in a clear, distinct voice said:

'If you are conscious of what is being done, make that known to us by blinking your eyelids.'

I had been looking at the face intently as this was said, and I was now absolutely horrified to observe that the eyelids actually did blink. I could endure no more. I seemed to be suffocating. I staggered to the door, flung it open, and, reaching the passage, fell down in a swoon.

When I recovered consciousness, Professor Grassard conveyed me to my residence in his carriage. I saw that he was very grave and thoughtful.

'I think,' he said quietly, as we neared our destination —'I think our experiments went a little beyond what we intended, for we seem to have brought the dead to life again.'

'Yes,' I answered with a shudder, 'and we have substantiated my theory, that the head of a human being may live for some minutes after its severance from the body; but nothing would ever induce me to undertake such experiments again.'

VII

JOHN MACDOUGAL'S DOUBLE

It boots not to indicate the precise *locale* of the truly remarkable incidents I am about to narrate. It is true that the many years that have passed have caused the details to fade from the public memory; but, nevertheless, there are reasons why the identity of the person and region should be concealed, though no doubt some of those who read this will recognise the spot from the description that follows.

Being of a studious disposition, and loving solitude, it was long my habit to make journeys on horseback through the least frequented parts of the country. This mode of locomotion suited me, for I was a valetudinarian, and the exercise was necessary to my well-being. I loved to dream, too, to work out problems as I rode along; and it suited my peculiar temperament to start off on these journeys in an aimless way; that is, to lay down no rule or route, but to wander just where the spirit of the hour or some passing fancy led me.

It thus chanced that, in the summer of 18—, I started for a week's holiday in this eccentric fashion, and turned my horse's head northward. It was my custom to carry such refreshments as I might require during the day in a small knapsack, and, being a very abstemious man—rather, however, from compulsion than choice—my needs were few and simple. At night I usually managed to find accommodation and hospitality for man and beast in some village hostelry or roadside

inn. I loved out-of-the-way places, rural simplicity and quietness, and, in so far as I followed any fixed plan, I was careful to avoid the great commercial centres, and the thronged highways. The leafy lanes, the woodland tracks, the breezy moorlands were more to my taste.

One sunny afternoon I found myself in a very wild but picturesque part of the country. Heather-clad hills rose up in a sort of amphitheatre, save to the west, where there was a break, and the eye travelled out to a great strip of the blue Atlantic Ocean, whose ponderous billows foamed on the iron rocks that terminated the land on that side.

It had been a sullen morning; sultry and gloomy. The sky had been cloudless, and the sea of a sepia tint, illuminated here and there with passing shafts of light that gleamed from rents in the clouds. There had been such an utter absence of motion in the air that the sullenness and the deceptive calm impressed one with a sense of impending disaster.

As the afternoon advanced it became more evident that a storm was brewing; and, not deeming it wise to longer ignore the portents, I began to cast about me for some place of shelter. The country, however, might have been in the heart of uninhabited Africa for any sign there was of human life. The landscape, moreover, was so much broken up by depressions, rises, and strips of woodland, that only a very limited area could be surveyed by the eye of the traveller, who knew not, therefore, whether the next dip or next rise would reveal the presence of some snug and nestling village or town. The main road was badly kept, and must have been a mere quagmire in the winter. Many by-paths and tracks ran off at various angles, but there was nothing to indicate where the paths led to, though it was reasonable to suppose that they had some connection with human dwellings.

Already heavy drops of rain had commenced to fall, and warned me to lose no further time in seeking shelter. But where? That was the question. I reined in my horse, stood up in the stirrups, and ran my eye all round, but I could see

no signs of a house. About a quarter of a mile ahead the road was carried through a cutting, and, in the absence of anything better, I thought that would afford at least partial shelter. I therefore gave my beast his head, just as a blinding zigzag of lightning tore through the black heavens, and seemed to burst open the flood-gates, for down came the rain in a deluge. I remember nothing like it for suddenness and severity. It was really as if some upholding force had been swept away, causing the water to tumble out of the heavens in unbroken streams. In less than a minute an extraordinary burst of thunder shook the solid earth, causing my good steed to swerve, and manifest every indication of fright. He was a faithful, intelligent animal that had carried me many hundreds of miles, but he was exceedingly sensitive and nervous, and so I patted his neck, coaxed him and spoke kindly in his ear, and he consented to go forward until we entered the cutting, the banks of which on each side rose to a considerable height, and were densely wooded, the consequence being that the road hereabouts was wrapped in gloom.

Once more there leapt from the sky a vivid flash of fire, followed almost immediately by a peal of thunder that was like the roll of heavy artillery. My horse reared and plunged to such an extent that I slipped out of the saddle in order to lead him by the bridle, and as I did so I was surprised to see a strange, wild-looking man standing in the very centre of the road. He was hatless, and his long, dark hair was sodden with the rain, while his face seemed to me to be cadaverous and white. He was tall and powerful, and dressed somewhat after the fashion of a gamekeeper. He wore a woollen shirt that was open at the neck, and revealed a considerable portion of the upper part of his chest, that, I noted, was covered with a mass of dark hair. He seemed utterly indifferent to the pouring rain, and had the appearance of one who was drenched to the skin. Yet he stood there motionless and unconcerned, and, as it appeared to me, with a savage glowering expression on his face.

Hailing him, I asked if there was a place of shelter or a house near, and at that moment my horse swerved again, as the heavens were once more illuminated with the lightning. This distracted my attention for some moments, as by the toss of his head he nearly pulled the bridle out of my hand. When I had pacified him, and turned to address the man, I was dumfoundered to find that he was no longer there. I called loudly two or three times, but there was no response, and I began to ask myself whether my senses had not deluded me, for what manner of man could it have been who could thus have ignored my question, seeing the plight and distress I was in?

But I put the idea of a delusion from me as unworthy of serious thought. I had noted every detail of the strange man and could have sworn to him amongst a thousand. Then suddenly it occurred to me that he was a robber; that he had companions near and had gone to warn them of my approach. I therefore drew out a double-barrelled pistol I always carried in my knapsack, and put it into the side pocket of my coat ready for immediate use in case of need.

I advanced for some yards, leading the horse and keeping my eyes about me, but I saw no sign of human being, and the only sounds I heard were the rushing of the rain and the shriek of the wind through the trees. Fortunately, on one side of the road was a large hollow from which stone had been taken. The top part projected very much, and was overhung with trees, so that it afforded a partial shelter. I placed my horse against the rock, and still held his bridle on my arm, and thrusting my free hand in my pocket I grasped my pistol and waited in suspense, expecting every moment to be attacked. For it had become a conviction with me that the man I had seen was a footpad, perhaps a gipsy, and that he would presently return with companions and attempt to murder and rob me. But an hour or more passed and he had not made his appearance. Gradually the storm died away, and the sky was enlivened by little patches of dark blue,

though over the hills hung dense and ragged masses of sombre clouds. Mounting my horse once more I rode forward, and in a little while I debouched upon an extraordinarily weird-looking stretch of country.

The gloaming was falling ; the blue strips of sky had deepened, and a strange wild stormlight came from seaward. As I saw the landscape under these atmospheric aspects, there was something positively ghastly about it. Here and there were groups of grotesque and distorted trees huddled together in the gloom, like whispering conspirators, and these were alternated by open spaces encircled by boulders that were suggestive of forgotten altars of some unholy worship. As I rode on in the gathering darkness, quickening my pace in my anxiety to find some shelter for the night, I passed straggling birch trees, whose white trunks gleamed ghostly and pallid amongst the deeper shades around. There were lonely pools begirt with rustling reeds, and from them now and again arose the melancholy boom of the bittern. On the banks of the streamlet, now hoarsely gurgling after the heavy rain, were blasted and stunted trees that in the uncertain light looked like withered witches, who, brooding on some deed of blood, had suddenly been stricken stiff by some avenging power. As I rode through this nightmare landscape, over which the shades of darkness were fast falling, there was occasionally a whir of wings, and a harsh cry startled me from time to time. Owls darted across my path, looking like little grey ghosts, and frogs croaked hoarsely in the reeds. I gave my beast the bridle, he lengthened his strides, the tree trunks ran into one another, overhead blinked a star or two between the rifts ; I seemed to lose my identity and to be swept onward, a flying phantom in a land of shadows.

In a little while I perceived a light ahead, and had no doubt that it proceeded from a human habitation, so, putting my horse to his fastest trot, I soon came to a whitewashed building, that I saw at once was an inn, and never did jaded

traveller welcome an inn as I did this. Alighting, I rapped on the door with my riding whip, and immediately there appeared a buxom, jovial, red-cheeked woman, who, in answer to my query as to whether I could have lodging and refreshment for myself and horse, said 'Certainly,' and ringing the bell for the ostler, to whom she gave instructions to care for my beast, she led me into the house, and, lighting a candle in a brass stand that gleamed like gold, she showed me upstairs and into a room that was redolent with lavender and comfortably furnished. The linen of the bed was white as driven snow, and the mahogany furniture polished until it was like a mirror. Having changed my clothes and refreshed myself with a wash, I descended to the dining-room, where the same scrupulous cleanliness and care were displayed. A snowy cloth was on the table that was spread with good things —a luscious ham, a roasted chicken, fresh butter, delicious honey, home-made bread, tea, toast, &c., to all of which I did ample justice, for I was as 'hungry as a hunter.' The genial landlady waited upon me, and chatted pleasantly the while, and from her I learned that the town of E—— was only two miles away. Her name was Macdougal, and she and her husband had kept the house for something like ten years. It stood on the estate of the Duke of D——, and John Macdougal was a gamekeeper in the service of his Grace. Having made a most hearty meal, and ascertained that my horse had been well cared for, I filled my pipe, and my hostess said that if I did not object she had no doubt her husband would be glad to keep me company. I thanked her for the suggestion, assured her that I should be delighted, and throwing myself on a couch I fell to dreaming pleasant dreams as I watched the smoke from my pipe curl ceilingward.

In about ten minutes a knock came to the door, and in reply to my 'Come in,' the landlord, John Macdougal, presented himself. As I cast my eyes upon him I almost uttered a cry of amazement, for he bore such a striking resemblance to the weird-like creature I had seen on the road during the

thunderstorm, and who had been deaf to my entreaties for assistance. As I rose into a sitting posture I said :

'I think we've met before.'

'Indeed ! When ?'

'An hour or two ago. In the cutting there on the road, and during the time that the storm was at its height.'

'You are certainly mistaken, sir,' he answered with a laugh. 'I have been in the gamekeeper's lodge on the Duke of D——'s estate all the afternoon, and, having been up the whole of the previous night, I slept for some hours, and was not disturbed by the storm.'

I was incredulous, and stared at the man, trying to read his thoughts ; but his dark eyes met mine fearlessly, and his face was full of frank openness. Moreover, his face was not cadaverous and ghostly like that of the man I had seen on the road, but was plump and rubicund. But still in all other respects he was a fac-simile.

Rising, I extended my hand, and he took it ; and, as I held his, I peered into his dark eyes, and said :

'Can you solemnly say you have never looked upon me before ?'

'Most solemnly,' he exclaimed ; 'at any rate not to my knowledge.'

I was puzzled, but not convinced. I could not dismiss from my mind the idea that in some way the man was deceiving me. Yet as I studied him I found that in some details he differed from the man I had seen on the road, though the details chiefly had reference to the wildness of the eyes, and the white, ghastly face. My host's eyes were soft and mild, almost like a fawn's ; while his face, as I have already said, was round and rubicund.

I did not discuss the subject further with John Macdougal, but I felt there was something strange, some mystery to be accounted for, and I confess to having had a yearning desire to clear the mystery up.

When I rose on the following morning I found there was

a daughter of the house—by name Rosa—a pretty, dark-eyed, dark-haired girl of two- or three-and-twenty. Unmistakably Macdougal's daughter; but, while she had his features and complexion, she was fragile, with a pale, thoughtful, pensive face. She was a pleasant girl, with a sweet voice and engaging manner, so that I was glad to converse with her. With rustic ingenuousness she offered to conduct me to the ruins of a notable castle that overhung the sea a mile and a half away, and gladly accepting her company I started on foot. I found her well versed in the topography of the country as well as its local history, and she afforded me much information.

The ruins were singularly picturesque. They stood on a bold wind-swept rock, around whose base the Atlantic billows ceaselessly made war.

As I stood in the ruins listening to the thunder of the waters, and drinking in deep draughts of the rich ozonised air that came off the face of the ocean, something prompted me to tell Rosa of my little adventure of the preceding day, and I wound up with saying:

'When I saw your father I was amazed at the likeness he bore to the strange being I met in the road.'

As I made this remark I saw the girl turn deadly pale, while in a voice that seemed to me to ring with sorrow she said:

'It must have been my father's double you saw.'

At first I did not know whether to take this in earnest, or whether it was a mere expression that had no implied meaning; but before I could make any reply she exclaimed with every indication of mental anguish:

'Oh, how foolish of me to tell you that, you who are an utter stranger!'

I was struck with the girl's manner. Moreover, what she told me at once afforded an explanation of the mystery; and though there were plenty of people who would have laughed the idea to scorn as unworthy of even a passing thought from men of sense, I was not one of them, and yet I had generally been credited with possessing an average amount of sense.

But I am a believer in the occult sciences. I have always been of opinion that there are mighty wonders in connection with our natures of which we have no conception.

'So your father has a double, then?' I remarked with solemn gravity.

'Yes, yes,' she answered in trepidation; 'but I cannot speak more about it. Please let us go back.'

She was evidently affected so that I had not the hardihood to ply her with further questions, but complied with her request. My interest, however, had been aroused, and I resolved to try and learn something more about John Macdougal's double.

On leaving my home it had been my intention to be absent a week. The week had already expired, but I found this country inn so comfortable and attractive that I was induced to prolong my stay Fortunately, I was pretty well master of my time, and so had no need to consult any one.

That afternoon Rosa came to me, and in a distressful voice and with tears in her eyes she said:

'Oh, sir, I pray you mention nothing to my parents of what I told you this morning. When the subject is referred to in my father's presence it almost drives him mad.'

I promised her that I would keep my own counsel, but I was determined to learn something more before leaving the neighbourhood. The subject had a perfect fascination for me, and I could not resist it.

Being naturally of an inquisitive temperament, I asked many questions about many things of the old country people who resided in the neighbourhood, and I soon learned that for a long time they had been living in a state of terror owing to a series of truly astounding murders, while all attempts to detect the perpetrator of these crimes had failed. First there was a woman, a hawker, found in a ditch by the roadside. Then a farm labourer, who had been ploughing all day, and was returning with his horses in the evening, was killed near a wood. Again, a well-known farmer who had been to the

market-town was discovered the following morning dead on the highway, his horse browsing near by. This was followed by the murder of a servant girl in a field; then a sailor on tramp was the victim; and finally, a country carrier who had travelled the road for many years went to swell the list.

Now these crimes were in the highest degree mysterious, for in no case was robbery the motive, the deceased's belongings being intact; while all the victims, without exception, were killed by being strangled with the hand. The throat of each was black and bruised, and showed unmistakably the deep indents of thumbs and fingers. Every endeavour possible, even to the offering of a large reward, had been made to discover the author of these extraordinary murders, but without avail. Nothing was got that would even justify a suspicion against any particular person. Then, again, what was the motive which prompted the outrages? It seemed to be literally a mere love of killing. I was greatly interested, and pondered deeply on the subject, and I tried by every process of reasoning to find some feasible theory of the crimes. The absence of apparent motive only added of course to the inscrutable mystery. One thing was certain, the murderer must have been a remarkably powerful man to accomplish his purpose as he had done, and a cunning man also to have defied detection so long.

Suddenly, as I dwelt upon the subject, it flashed across my mind that John Macdougal was the murderer *through his double*. I could not help this thought as I remembered that wild, fierce, powerful fellow I had seen on the road. Of course your men of common sense, as they would have been pleased to have termed themselves, would have laughed me to scorn for such an idea. But it was not my habit to reject a proposition as untenable simply because known laws would not apply to it, and very soon I was to receive a fearful practical illustration that I was right.

At the end of my week's stay at the inn a new guest arrived. He was a traveller for the great firm of B—— & Company

of Manchester. He was a little, sharp-eyed, genial man, who had been on the road for many years, and was full of anecdote and *bonhomie*. We soon struck up an acquaintance, and spent the evening together until a late hour, when we both retired. He occupied a room next to mine, and about four o'clock in the morning I was awakened by an extraordinary sound proceeding from his room. Daylight was already breaking, and a soft, rosy light was stealing over the landscape, and showing through my blind. I sprang out of bed and listened, and I became convinced I could hear the scuffling of feet, and a strange gurgling sound as if someone was gasping for breath and was in great pain. Instantly a terrible thought seized me, and rushing out of my own room, I hurried to my neighbour's, flinging open his door without knocking. Then I was rooted to the spot with horror, for in the uncertain light I discerned a sight that froze my blood. On the bed was the commercial traveller, and standing at the side was the fierce, wild man who had confronted me in the cutting on the road. His hands were round the traveller's throat. Before I could recover from the shock he turned upon me. His face was fiendish in its fierce expression; foam was about his lips, and his eyes blazed like living coals. With a sudden movement he strode over to me, and, with a sweep of his arms, hurled me into a corner. I think I must have been stunned, for there was a blank that I could not fill up. When I recovered, it was almost full daylight. I rose and went to the bed, and was appalled to find that the commercial traveller was dead. He had been strangled, and his throat was swollen and black.

I hurried to John Macdougal's room. The door was locked, but, putting my shoulder to it, I burst it open. John Macdougal was in his bed. He was in a deep, trance-like sleep, and his breathing was not perceptible. His face was deathly pale but placid. I called him by his name and shook him, but without avail. His wife, who slept in an adjoining

room, came rushing in. I told her that murder had been done in the house, and her husband was the murderer.

She uttered a wild shriek of despair and exclaimed:

'It is false! my husband sleeps, as you see.'

I was dumfoundered in the presence of this awful mystery, for mystery it was. Was I a victim of some horrible nightmare? No, for in a few minutes the aroused household discovered that the commercial traveller had been too surely strangled.

It was eight o'clock before John Macdougal awoke from his strange sleep. He looked dazed and ill, and I shrank from him as from something uncanny.

I had despatched a messenger to the town for the police, who soon arrived, and an investigation into the circumstances of the crime was made. My position was a most unenviable one. I had absolutely witnessed the murder, had seen the murderer, and recognised him as a man I had met before, and who was exactly like John Macdougal, and yet, within half an hour at the most of my witnessing the crime, I beheld John Macdougal soundly sleeping in his bed.

As a truthful man I could do no more than state what I had seen, and the result was Macdougal was arrested.

In due course he was brought to trial, and I was forced to appear as a witness against him. The story I told naturally created amazement and incredulity. The prisoner's wife and daughter, who usually slept with her mother in the room adjoining that of the prisoner, swore that to the best of their belief he had never left his room on the night of the crime. His employer, the Duke of D——, gave him an excellent character as a quiet, inoffensive man, as did also his neighbours. And, save for my story, there was nothing at all to connect him with the murder. The result was that everyone believed the murder had been committed by another man resembling John Macdougal, and the prisoner was acquitted, and he and his family emigrated to Australia, though he himself never reached that country. He disappeared suddenly one night, and was

never seen again. It was supposed that he either jumped or fell overboard.

The murderer of the commercial traveller in the lonely inn, and of the six other persons, all of whom had been killed in the same manner by strangulation, was never discovered, and never will be till the end of time. All the circumstances of the crimes were involved in awful mystery that defied human penetration; but I have never had any doubt in my own mind that the unfortunate people were done to death by John Macdougal's double. Who was his double? Can there be any other answer than that, while the real man was in a sort of trance state, his other self, fierce and bloodthirsty, issued forth to prey like a ghoul on those with whom he came in contact? And often have I shuddered as I have remembered how I met this ghoul in the lonely cutting during the thunderstorm, and who, but for some inexplicable reason, would have added me to his list of victims. Truly, 'there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.'

VIII

THE BRIDE OF DEATH

THE house of Sabine had ever been noted for the beauty and queenliness of its women, but none surely had ever been more beautiful and Juno-like than Patricia Sabine. She was indeed worthy of her house, and her house was proud of her. The Sabines were an ancient race, whose proud boast it was that they had descended from that line of grand old Norse kings of whom Frithiof the Bold was such a distinguished representative, and in the library of the Sabine mansion the Frithiof Saga emblazoned on silk and framed in a frame of pure red gold hung on the wall. For the family were proud of this redoubtable ancestor, and honoured his memory by thus framing the romance of which he was the hero.

The beauty of a woman may be suggested by words, but they must ever fail to do full justice to the subject, for it is by the eye alone that beauty can be best understood. There is, in fact, a beauty that neither words nor brush can paint, a beauty that owes much to the warm flush of light—I am still referring to feminine beauty—the delicacy of colouring in the skin, the wondrous changes of expression, the magic of the eyes, the grace of carriage, the sweetness of voice. These are things that defy the artist and penman alike. The Greeks of old gave us beauty in their sculptures, but, after all, it was the beauty of death. It is well, however, that the reader should know something of Patricia Sabine, even though the

picture has but a faint resemblance to the original. Grace of mould, perfection of limb, stateliness of carriage, were qualities which had ever been characteristic of the Sabine, with a certain imperiousness, which was an added charm; for such a type of human nature would have been imperfect had it lacked lordliness. The Norse blood was easily traceable in Patricia—in the tall, stately figure, the clear, deep-set blue eyes. Not the pale, sickly blue which accompanies the lymphatic temperament, but that wondrous violet, such as one sees in the waters that lave the islands of the West Indies, but which must ever be a stranger to the painter's palette, for it is one of the hues that the cunning of man has never yet been able to wring from Nature; and fringing these eyes were long silken lashes, and framing them were arched eyebrows of wondrous perfectness. The complexion of the face was literally that of the peach, than which it is difficult, even if we ransack Nature, to imagine anything more delicate, more perfect in its blending of tones, or more exquisitely chaste; a straight nose, with quivering nostrils, that responded to every passing emotion, even as an Æolian harp responds to the lightest of zephyrs; lips that had the coral's redness, and in their curve the grace of Ulysses' bow. Her teeth were as ivory, and gleamed, even as wet ivory gleams, when her lips were parted. But even such a face as this, a face that wanted nothing in each individual feature to make up a perfect whole, would still have been imperfect had it lacked that crown of a woman's adornment—the hair. Truly her hair was Patricia's glory; it was a glory of the sun's red gold, and when it fell about her it was like a veil, and might have excited envy in the breast even of one of the mythological sea nymphs whose locks served completely to enfold them.

Fortunately for her, the hideous fashion of gathering the hair up tightly from the neck and plaiting it up in a lump on the crown of the head had not come into vogue. But even if it had, and she had chosen to wear hers so, her *nuque*

would have stood the test of the most rigid criticism. I have used this French word because it expresses so much, and is so wholly untranslatable; for while in one sense it means the nape of the neck, it also has reference to the curved swell of the back part of the head, which embraces the base of the ears and the top part of the neck. Many a woman who gathers up her hair and drags it tightly from the neck is all forgetful how few there are who can afford to expose this part of the neck. For where the lines are rigid and pronounced, and the ears bulge away from their base, the artistic eye is shocked and the canons of true art are outraged. But Patricia Sabine had nothing to fear in this respect. Her dainty head was joined to dainty shoulders by a swan-like neck, absolutely faultless in its lines and curves. I confess to a fear that some who read this description may think I have exaggerated, for, alas! it is sadly true that the ideal beauty in modern women is rarely seen. It is sacrificed to the artificial style of living and the Moloch of fashion. But Patricia came from a race who through long generations had been famous for their beauty, and she seemed to have inherited the type in its most exalted aspect.

It will be readily supposed that such a woman lacked not lovers. Men there were who would have dared the horrors of Hades itself for her favouring smile. But sighs and entreaties were alike unavailing until she met Jasper Rehel. It is difficult to tell why she was attracted by him, unless it was due to some powerful magnetic influence which she could not resist.

Rehel was a strange man. In stature less than she, with eyes that were as dark as sloes, and glowed like polished ebony. His hair, in striking contrast to hers, was jet black; his complexion swarthy and colourless. His type was Spanish, and he had the Spaniard's fire, the Spaniard's pride. He was not handsome, and yet he was attractive; but in what that attractiveness lay would have puzzled any mere casual observer to determine. There was something mystic about him that defied penetration.

Although his family had long been settled in England, he had spent many years of his life in the East, and had wandered in some of the remotest parts of Egypt where the foot of the ordinary traveller rarely treads.

Physically Jasper and Patricia might have mated with advantage, but temperamentally they were opposed to each other. She represented the sunshine and wine of life, he the gloom and the sorrow. She was open and frank as the day, he was given to esotery. And yet she became fascinated with him, and he talked burning, passionate love to her. But the connection did not meet the approval of her family. They named many reasons why it was inexpedient for her to marry him, but their most forcible and unanswerable objection perhaps was that he was a dreamer, not a worker. His wanderings, extensive as they had been, seemed to have all been aimless. He had not enriched the world by adding to its knowledge, and he appeared to have devoted his time to gathering up the mystical lore of the countries through which he passed. He must have had some idea that his suit would not find favour with her relatives, for one night, as they returned from a visit to some of his friends, he suddenly seized her hand, and with passionate exclamation said:

'Patricia, do you really love me?'

It was a brilliant, frosty night. The air was crisp and crystalline, the stars shone with an Arctic splendour, the moon was like a shield of burnished silver. The lovers had preferred to walk, though a carriage was at their disposal, for they wanted the joy of 'Love's sweet dalliance.' Their way was along a lonely road, shaded by giant beeches, through whose tangled branches the moonlight fell, and was wrought into gleaming filagree work on the ground below. And all around the landscape lay in the shimmering light, looking like an unreal land, or rather a land of mystery; for all was so still, the shadows were so impenetrable, the lighted parts so dream-like in the silver sheen. Some little distance off, sunk in a hollow, was a large tarn, partly in shadow and partly in light,

and it needed but a very small stretch of imagination, as one gazed at it with the glamour of the night about it, to fancy that strange beings from the spirit-world were gliding over its mirror-like surface. Surely it must have been in such a spot as this that the beautiful but erring Queen Guinever met her lover, Sir Launcelot of the Lake.

Patricia was a little startled by her lover's brusqueness, and she made answer with somewhat faltering accents:

'Yes, but your question seems to imply a doubt on your part.'

'It does imply a doubt,' he replied. 'I do not feel sure of you. Nay, start not. You know that your people are opposed to me.'

'That is true, but have I not told you that I am yours?'

'You have. But in what way have I influenced you?'

A little shudder thrilled her at this question, and she answered:

'By some power you possess, and to which I cannot give a name. I am drawn to you irresistibly. You have for me the attraction that the loadstone has for the needle.'

He burst into a strange laugh that had mockery in it, and said with some bitterness:

'I understand you are influenced by me, but you do not really love me?'

'You have no right to say that,' she replied, with a rising inflexion in her tone.

'I speak as I feel and think,' said he firmly. 'I see into your heart and read it. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to say that you are deceiving me wilfully. You *think* you love me.'

'Nay, I am sure,' she answered in low tones, and, in spite of herself, experiencing a sense of shrinking from him, for he spoke so strangely, and his piercing eyes, in which the moonlight was reflected, seemed capable of reading her most secret thoughts.

'I am sure that *I love you*,' he exclaimed with passionate

energy, and seizing her in his arms he kissed her with the burning passion of an ardent lover. Then with the abruptness peculiar to him he stopped, and holding both her hands in his, while he peered fixedly into her eyes, he said :

'You know, Patricia, that according to the mythology of the Persians every star in the heavens has its special spirit, and every man has his attendant star which receives him at death. This is something more than mythology to me, it is truth. My star and your star are with us now, and hear our words. In their hearing vow that you love me to all eternity.'

She was half frightened of him. He had never talked like this before. Was it wine in his head or madness ? she asked herself. The expression of his face was strange, his fiery eyes seemed to burn into her very soul. She could not help but recoil from him, but he drew her forward again and asked :

'Are you afraid to confess your love now that I have told you two spirits are witnesses ? '

'What nonsense you are talking ! ' she said.

'Nonsense ! ' he cried, with a hoarse laugh. 'Nonsense, because you cannot see what I can see. I see two strange forms that walk beside us. They are shadowy and dream-like, but still I see them, and they shall be witnesses to your vow.'

'What vow ? ' she asked in tremulous tones.

'I want you to vow solemnly now, with all those burning stars looking down upon us, and in the face of that peerless moon, and in the presence of these ghostly witnesses, that you love me, and will be bride to no one but me.'

She could not be indifferent to his unusual and peculiar manner. Never before had he exhibited this phase of his character, and she was really alarmed, but with the boldness and firmness of her race she made answer thus :

'Jasper, I will vow nothing, or tell you nothing, while you are in this strange mood. Conduct me at once to my home, and if that is not agreeable to you I will go alone.'

He appeared to be deeply hurt. An expression of pain

and sorrow swept across his swarthy face. He bowed lowly and with frigid politeness, and offering her his arm uttered the one word :

'Come!'

They walked along in silence for some distance. Then he suddenly said :

'Patricia, if you and I are not wedded in life, we shall be wedded in death. No other man but I can ever possess you. Mark every word of this. It is well that you should.'

He spoke with such emphasis, such solemnity, that again she shuddered, and when a little later he bade her good-night on the steps of her home, and pressed his cold lips to hers she felt a positive relief that the moment for parting from him had come.

That night's experience opened her eyes, and she saw what she had been unable to see before. She saw that this strange man with his gloomy and supernatural views was not fitted to be her mate, and that it would be the height of folly for her who was so richly endowed, and so deeply impressed with the joyousness of living, to wed herself to him. Up to that night she had really believed that she loved him, but she was fully conscious now that he had exerted a power over her —a power that had fascinated her—but had not won her heart. How could there be love between two natures so utterly at variance ?

The result of her reasoning was that on the following day she wrote him a not unkindly, but at the same time a firmly expressed, letter, in which she pointed out that happiness was not at all likely to come out of a union between them. She dwelt upon their want of similarity in tastes, and of her abhorrence of the views he held, and concluded with saying that the engagement was broken, and that he must seek some one for a wife who was more suited to him.

For a few days she heard nothing of him. Then he came to the house, and besought an interview, but, fearing to trust herself in his presence, she resolutely declined to see him,

and two or three days later he sent a note containing these lines :

'*Remember our last interview, and what I said. These were my words :—" Patricia, if you and I are not wedded in life, we shall be wedded in death. No other man but I can ever possess you. Mark every word of this. It is well that you should."* '

For a little time she could not shake off a feeling of depression. She did not like to believe that she was in the least degree superstitious, and yet she had to own that she was affected in an unaccountable way. She recalled his wild manner on that solemn starlit night when he had given utterance to those words, as if he had been inspired and was prophesying. As the weeks rolled away, however, and she neither saw nor heard anything of her strange lover, the feeling of depression wore off, and she blamed herself for having been so easily affected. But occasionally with remarkable suddenness and vividness the scene of that night came before her mental vision, and she saw it again as if it were an actual reality. There were the dark blue sky gemmed with its myriads of scintillating stars, the moon clear as a silver shield, the great beech trees, the filigree work woven from light and shadow on the road, the country bathed in dreamy light, the glittering tarn—every detail and every point of the scene rose up before her, and also the spirit of the scene, the remarkable man who had breathed a passionate recital of love to her, and had asked her to vow her love for him in the presence of the astral spirits—those spirits of the stars which he said were to be witnesses to the vow. She would have liked to have forgotten him entirely, but that seemed an impossibility. His dark, wild face and his fiery eyes haunted her.

Six months passed, and she heard nothing whatever of him, save a rumour that he had gone to Egypt again. Then she met Ernest Willoughby, Lord D——, son of that Lord D—— who so distinguished himself during the Crimean War, and who died of wounds and privations in the trenches be-

fore Sebastopol. Ernest, himself a gallant soldier who had already seen much service, was a year or two her senior. He was handsome, brave, frank, and full of life and spirits—a striking contrast indeed to Jasper Rehel. His family were noble, too, and wealthy, so that a match between the two houses was one that strongly recommended itself to both parties.

Almost from the first time of meeting the young people fell in love, and it would have been difficult to have found a couple more suited to each other. Her peerless beauty was well matched by his splendid figure and handsome face There was no serious love-making, however, until two months later, when he sought permission to pay his addresses to her, and as she was nothing loth they stood pledged to each other as lovers. But before she gave him her pledge, she honestly told him of her connection with Jasper Rehel.

'Jasper Rehel!' he exclaimed as he heard the name; and, then, after reflecting for some minutes, he said: 'I wonder if it is the same Jasper Rehel I met once in Egypt? He was at Hermopolis when I was there, and subsequently we journeyed down the Nile together.'

'Yes, it must be the same,' she cried; 'for he has been much in Egypt, and I have heard him say he was at Hermopolis.'

'Well, if it is the same man,' Ernest said somewhat contemptuously, 'he is a half-mad mystic, who professed to have studied the occult sciences of the Egyptians. I remember I offended him very much because I laughed at him and told him he would land himself in a lunatic asylum, when he told me he had the power of holding converse with the spirits of the dead.'

Patricia shuddered and said:

'Well, don't let us talk any more of the man. Though I think I ought to tell you this, he assured me that if I did not become his wife, I should never be wife to anyone else.'

'Did he threaten you?' asked Ernest quickly, and firing up with anger.

'Oh, no, not exactly that. He spoke as it were prophetically.'

'Well, you can afford to treat that sort of thing with contempt,' answered Ernest. 'The prophecies of such a crack-brained noodle are not in the least likely to come true.'

'Perhaps not,' answered Patricia; but the manner in which she said this showed that she was still to some extent affected by Rehel's influence. But from that moment he was not referred to again by the lovers, who by mutual consent decided that henceforth his name should be a dead letter between them.

The adage that the course of true love never did run smooth was not to be verified in their case. Nothing occurred to interrupt the harmony of their wooing, and never were a man and woman prouder of each other than they were. Ernest was in the habit of saying that the world had not such another woman as Patricia; but lovers have said that sort of thing since time began. Nevertheless, Patricia Sabine, all things considered, would have been difficult to outrival, for allied to beauty of no ordinary kind were a most winning tenderness and a true womanly nature. Everyone who knew these two predicted for them a long life of unalloyed happiness. The star of good fortune seemed to shine with the most perfect effulgence over their path. The day of the wedding came at last. The marriage, as befitted the union of two such houses, was to be a grand one, and to be solemnised in the parish church of the bride's native town.

It was summer time, and over the glad earth was cast a robe of beauty, into which a wealth of colour had been wrought. A wet spring, followed by long brilliant days, had, like a cunning alchemist, turned the cloddy earth to glittering gold. But on the very morning—a morning brilliant with sunlight, while the air was languid with the scent of a thousand flowers, and palpitating with the passionate melody of the birds—when Patricia Sabine rose, joyous at the thought that in a few hours she would become the bride of the man

to whom she had given her heart, and with whom she hoped to journey through life, until in the fulness of time, like a good and faithful servant, whose duty had been well done, she would pass to that higher life where happiness knoweth no blight—her maid put a letter into her hand. It was a large square envelope with the device of a serpent on the flap. At any other time she might have been struck by the eccentricity of this device; but now she was all eagerness, all excitement, for her bridal-dress and wreath were there ready to don, and a woman on her bridal morn has no eyes for trivialities that do not bear upon the business of the hour. So she tore the envelope open. It contained a sheet of parchment-like paper, at the head of which was the same device of a serpent, and in addition, in the left-hand corner, was a veiled, shadowy figure, whether male or female it was impossible to tell, for the form was only suggested by the diaphanous veil that enveloped it. And over the head of the figure floated a golden star. On the paper written in red ink was this line:

'*We shall be wedded in death. No other man but I can possess you.*'

There was no address, no signature, no date. But these things were not needed to tell her whose hand had penned those cruel words.

The paper fluttered to the ground, and with a little cry she reeled against her toilet table, and her maid in alarm sprang to her assistance. But she recovered herself in a few moments, and said:

'Oh, how stupid of me, Marie! Forgive me for alarming you. It is nothing!'

She laughed, but it was a laugh without laughter in it, for once again before her mental vision came back the scene of that wintry night, and she saw the dark, flashing, sinister eyes of Jasper Rehel peering into hers.

She picked up the sheet of paper; she tore it into little shreds and threw them into the grate. But she could not so

easily get rid of the strange, nervous dread that had seized her. Her beautiful face was clouded, and some of its colour had faded away, while in those wonderful, violet eyes was a restless expression, as though she half expected to see Rehel's strange, weird face come before her in reality.

Why had he done such a cruel thing as this? Why on that morning of all mornings, when the glad earth seemed to be singing an anthem of great joy, had he placed a sting in her heart, and overshadowed her brightness, which, on such an occasion, should have been perfect? It showed, at least, that *he* had not forgotten what they had been to each other, and this shaft had been levelled at her on her bridal morn by reason of the bitterness he felt.

Presently she stood decked in her bridal robes, and as she surveyed herself in her mirrors the magnificent picture that met her gaze even put Rehel out of her head. Truly she was magnificent, and so radiant in her beauty that a king might have been tempted to sell his kingdom to possess her.

An hour later, when she walked up the aisle of the church leaning on her father's arm to the altar, where her husband-elect stood ready to receive her, all the eyes of the assembled congregation were turned upon her in admiration. A bride more bride-like, more stately, more entrancing, it would have been difficult to picture. And through the eastern windows fell a glory and wealth of colour, and from the organ rose peal upon peal of an anthem, while about the altar steps was a Paradise of flowers. But amidst all this pomp and wealth, amongst all this colour and beauty, the beauty of women and flowers, there was an unbidden guest, whom no one, with one exception, saw, and this unbidden guest was Azrael.

When the last words had been uttered which made the twain one, there rose from one of the front pews a man, whose face was like the face of death, but whose eyes burned with a strange fire. He moved to the altar steps, gliding as it seemed rather than walking. So unearthly did he look in his pallor and the wildness of his expression that those who

saw him might have been pardoned for mistaking him for an apparition. But it was no apparition, but Jasper Rehel. So rapid had been his movement that no one could stop him, and suddenly he placed his hand on the bride's shoulder. She turned to see who had touched her, and then with a piercing cry of terror she fell back in her husband's arms. Rehel was tottering on his feet, a sickly, greenish hue spread over his face, and speaking in a husky, gasping voice, like one who was suffocating, while he pointed his finger at the bride, he uttered these strange words :

'In my veins courses a deadly and subtle poison distilled from Egyptian herbs. I am Death and you are my bride ; we cross the dark tide together.'

He reeled like a sapling that is shaken in the wind ; something in the nature of a mocking laugh broke from his blue lips ; then he sank down on the altar steps a corpse. Then and not till then was the spell lifted that seemed to have bound the assembly during those awful moments, for this unparalleled scene of horror was all enacted within a minute. Women fainted, and men seemed to lose their heads. With a wail of anguish, the poor husband lifted his unconscious wife in his strong arms, and bore her to the carriage, and she was quickly conveyed back to the home from whence she had issued an hour or so ago so full of life, so radiant in beauty, so happy in the thought that she was soon to be the wife of her heart's choice. Medical aid was summoned from all quarters. Everything that human skill could do was done. But Rehel's prophecy proved only too true ; she never rallied from the shock, but ere the day was done death had claimed her. And the lover, husband, and widower, all within a day, bowed his head over her sweet body and wept, for he was a broken-hearted man.

Jasper Rehel's revenge had been gratified, his prophecy fulfilled. If he was a madman he was possessed of more than the ordinary cunning of madness ; and no man surely ever planned a more thrilling and ghastly tableau than that

which took place at the altar steps at a moment when the woman he had once professed to love became the wife of another. If he had merely counted on the effect that the shock of his startling suicide would produce he had counted well. But perhaps when he spoke on that memorable winter night, he spoke with the certainty of foreknowledge. Perhaps some power that we know naught of enabled him to see the whole scene as it was to occur. But whatever it was—there are some mysteries too inscrutable for human ken—the result was the same; and one of the most beautiful of women, in the very fulness of her joy and happiness, and in the first few minutes of her wifehood, was claimed as the Bride of Death.

The bowed and stricken husband never recovered from the blow. In active service abroad he sought that excitement which seemed the only thing calculated to prevent him from sinking into a condition of morbid melancholy. But nothing could ever lift the great shadow that had fallen on his life. That life ended, however, during the recent campaign in the Soudan. Although his youth was far behind him, and his hair was white with the snows of time, he volunteered for active service, and fell, sword in hand, on the burning sands of Egypt, while leading a little band of devoted followers against an overwhelming horde of Arabs. He sought a glorious death, and found it.

IX

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST

A STORY OF A CHRISTMAS JOY

'PEACE on earth, goodwill towards men,' rang out the Christmas bells joyously over the frozen snow; but to one person at least they grated harshly, inharmoniously, for they were suggestive of a never-dying sorrow. This person was Sir Wilfrid Woofenden, Baronet, of Pine Tree Hall, situated on the outskirts of the charming little village of ——, in Berkshire.

Sir Wilfrid was a tall, patrician-looking man, who had once been handsome. But, though not very old, his hair was silver, and his face seemed clouded with a sorrow that had no words. Pine Tree Hall had ever been noted for its hospitality, and under its roof on this bright, crisp morning, when the bells from the village church rang out the old greeting, was assembled a large number of guests. But though Christmas day always saw the Hall crowded, its owner knew no joy, for the day was pregnant with a bitter memory; and to explain this we must tell something of his family history. He had married a lady of equal rank with himself, and she had borne him two daughters—Ethel and Muriel; and one son—Wilfrid—the heir and hope of the house.

He was a fine lad, and seemed to give promise of great things. But that promise was not redeemed, and, though he was not dead in fact, he was dead so far as his family was con-

cerned. His chair in the Hall was ever empty ; his voice was never heard there ; even his portrait had been taken down from its accustomed place, and no one would have had the hardihood even to have mentioned his name. If he survived his father he would succeed to the title and estates—that is, the entailed portion of them ; but the old Baronet had rashly sworn that while he himself lived his reprobate son should never touch a penny of his money.

'Let him go forth a beggar, and starve in his shame and disgrace,' he had exclaimed in a fiery outburst of passion when he first heard that his one son and heir had brought dishonour upon his house.

Truly the story was pitiable enough. Wilfrid had been at Rugby, then at Oxford, but his career at college had been marked by excesses that were all but unpardonable, even in an undergraduate. He was engaged to be married to Hester Branscombe, the only daughter of Mrs. Branscombe, the widow of Major-General Branscombe, who had died in India. The Branscombes and the Woofendens were very old friends. Major Branscombe and Sir Wilfrid had been at college together, and it had been the dearest wish of Sir Wilfrid's heart that his son should marry Hester. But young Woofenden was unusually wild, and, though he professed to be madly in love with Hester, he went off with a ballet dancer, being first expelled his college, and having forged Mrs. Branscombe's name to a bill of exchange, whereby he obtained a large sum of money.

Sir Wilfrid was thunderstricken when he heard the news. That a scion of his house should have been guilty of such dishonour was almost impossible to believe. But, alas ! it was true enough ; and the disgrace, the shame, and the sorrow the scapegrace brought upon the two families could scarcely be told by words. The Baronet's pride was wounded to the quick, and he said he would never hold up his head again. He of course paid the money for the forged bill of exchange, but that was the least part of the mischief. The

blow fell so heavily on Hester that for some time her life was despaired of. She gradually recovered, however, though it was generally acknowledged that she was never the same girl again. Her life was blighted, and the brightness of her youth had left her. She alone knew how much she loved the handsome, dare-devil Wilfrid, who had often told her that without her life would not be worth living. She believed that he was sincere in what he said, and even when it was discovered that he had fled she refused to believe at first that he had deceived her. But gradually the awful truth came home to her; and when she recovered from her illness she put the sorrow deep down in her heart, and had borne it there for ten long years.

She was a guest at the Hall on this Christmas day. In fact she was never absent from these annual gatherings, for between her and the Misses Woofenden existed a sisterly friendship that nothing had ever interrupted.

Pine Tree Hall was one of the old baronial mansions for which Berkshire is famous. It was said to have been originally built in Richard the Third's time, and though it had been enlarged and improved by successive proprietors, much of the original building still remained. It stood in a grand park, famous for its chestnuts and beeches, and its turrets and towers were a conspicuous landmark for many miles round. It was a family custom of the Woofendens to worship in the village church on Christmas morning, and such of their guests as desired to do so accompanied them; while another custom was that dinner on Christmas day was always served at two o'clock.

The morning had been bright, with a sharp, frosty air. There had been a heavy snowstorm some days previously, and, as no thaw had followed, the snow lay thick on all the country side. As the afternoon approached, however, there was a change in the weather. The barometer rose, and snow commenced to fall again, and by the time dinner was ended it was snowing heavily. This put a stop to a sleighing party

that had been organised, and something else for the entertainment of the guests had to be thought of.

Although the old Baronet was the soul of hospitality, his heart never seemed to be in the gatherings now, for it was on a Christmas day, strangely enough, that news of his son's shame and disgrace first reached him. The day, therefore, could not fail to painfully remind him of the shadow that hung over his ancient house, and though he never mentioned Wilfrid's name, and would allow no one else of the household to mention it, there can be no doubt he thought much of him. And his memory must often have reverted to the time when the merry, golden-haired youngster was the life and joy of the old home. So keen was his sorrow even now that he liked to give vent to it in solitude, and would, when he could do so without discourtesy, retire to his library, where he smoked and reflected on the terrible disappointment of his life.

As the snowstorm kept the guests indoors, games of various kinds were indulged in, for there was a considerable number of young people present, and Ethel and Muriel took the lead in suggesting amusements to pass the time. Sir Wilfrid had been able to withdraw without being missed, and having shut himself in the library he had gone to sleep.

Soon after darkness had set in, and the lamps had been lighted, Muriel approached her sister, and whispered:

'The butler tells me that old Nance is in one of her trance moods again. Would it not be fun to get her into the dining-room? It might amuse the guests.'

'No,' answered Ethel, who was the elder. 'I cannot countenance that. Why expose Nance to ridicule?'

'Oh, very well, Ethel; just as you like,' replied her sister, a little piqued, for she did not attach the importance to the old woman's 'trance moods' that Ethel did.

Nance was an old servant of the family, having been in the service for over forty years, and had nursed all the children in their babyhood. She had been greatly attached to Wilfrid, and had been heard to say that she never could

understand why his father had been so harsh to him. But then Nance had always been blind to his faults. She was a gentle, good-natured woman, but was generally referred to by her fellow-servants as being 'a little bit cracked.' She had earned this reputation owing to her belief in the supernatural. To her ghosts were very real things, and sometimes she went off into a sort of waking trance, when she babbled of all sorts of wondrous things. In spite of this eccentricity, or whatever one liked to call it, she had been as true as steel to the family, and every member of it loved and honoured her. But while Muriel used to laugh at Nance's visions, Ethel had firm faith in them, and she was fond of being alone with Nance, and listening to some of the marvellous stories from the old woman's apparently inexhaustible *répertoire*.

When Nance fell into one of her so-called trance moods she did not, as might be supposed, go to sleep, but became restless and excited, wandering about her room waving her arms wildly, her eyes wide open but apparently blank and fixed on space. In this state she mumbled and muttered, sometimes incoherently; at others she would tell a plain, straightforward narrative of what she saw; and so startling and weird were some of her 'visions' that it required a tremendous lot of faith to believe in them. When Nance recovered from this peculiarly morbid condition she vowed that she had no recollection of anything she had said or seen. She was generally prostrated for two or three days after one of her attacks, which were liable to be brought on by any undue excitement. That she should have been seized, therefore, on this Christmas night was not astonishing, for everyone in the house had been more or less excited during the day.

In a little while Ethel stole away from the guests and went to Nance's room. The old woman was pacing up and down as usual. Her hair was dishevelled, her eyes fixed, and looking almost like glass. She took no notice of Ethel's entrance, and did not seem in the least disturbed. Ethel sat

down on the chair and watched Nance's face with absorbed interest, and the first words she caught were these :

'——He is lying sick unto death, and he babbles of his home. It is a strange country. The sun always shines fiercely, and there are great forests and savage beasts.'

'Of whom do you speak?' asked Ethel softly; but Nance heeded her not, and continued :

'It is a cruel fever that has laid him low, but he fights it and battles with it, and now he grows strong again.' She paused in her walk, rested her hand on the table, and stood like one who was listening intently, trying to catch some sound. Suddenly she exclaimed, or rather she hissed the words out :

'Hark! They are coming—always coming. I hear them ; the old familiar footsteps.' There was another pause. Then she said : 'They cease,' and she resumed her walk. Presently she began to speak again, seemingly with great agitation, and as if she was suffering much anguish. 'How the storm-wind blows! The waves are rolling mountains high, and the ship is tossed to and fro, and I see him. Poor dear! poor dear! His eyes are sad and wistful, and he looks wan and worn. Ah!' she cried with a little scream, 'the ship is lost. She strikes the rocks.' Then, after a breathless pause, she added joyfully : 'He is saved! he is saved!'

'Who is it? Who is saved?' Ethel asked, for sometimes the old woman would answer questions when in this state. Nance, however, did not answer this time, and in a few minutes her face was once again contorted with seeming anguish, and wringing her hands she exclaimed :

'Death is threatening him again. He lies on a little bed in a hospital ward. The swinging lamps show me his poor face, so drawn, so white. But there are good nurses about him. They are sisters of mercy. They wipe his lips. They give him food and medicine. But always in his eyes is that wistful, pleading look. Ah, why is he not forgiven?'

As she uttered the latter sentence she gave a great sigh

and seemed much agitated, and then suddenly it occurred to Ethel that it was her brother Wilfrid the old woman was talking about; and, unable to control her feelings, she broke into tears, and said in a tone that scarcely rose above a whisper:

'Oh Nance! is it of Wilfrid you are speaking?'

'Hush!' responded the old woman, 'his name must not be mentioned here.'

'Nance, Nance,' cried the poor girl in her great distress, 'tell me, does my dear brother live?'

'Hush! Hark! They are coming—always coming. I hear them; the old familiar footsteps.'

Ethel was almost breathless now in her suppressed excitement, and she hung on every utterance of the strange old woman. For she had none of Muriel's scepticism. To her all this was terribly real and fascinating.

'Once more there is a ship at sea,' continued the old woman, 'and I see him, but always with that sad pale face, with the yearning, pleading eyes. Poor lad, poor lad, how he has suffered!'

She became incoherent now, and mumbled something that it was impossible to make sense out of. Then suddenly she stopped again, and leaned on the table as before, repeating her former words:

'Hark! They are coming—always coming. I hear them; the old familiar footsteps.'

There was another spell of incoherency, when once again she repeated, as if it were a refrain:

'Hark! They are coming—always coming. I hear them; the old familiar footsteps.'

Ethel was greatly agitated. She felt as if she must cry out to relieve her pent-up feelings, but she managed to control herself. Nance's glazed eyes seemed to be staring through the wall now, and with upraised finger she was repeating in a monotone:

'They are coming, coming—always coming.'

'Nance, Nance!' moaned Ethel, 'who is it you see? Tell, tell me, is it my dear brother?'

'Yes,' whispered Nance hoarsely, 'but speak not his name He is always coming nearer. He moves slowly, and with pain. Ah! how sad, how sad!'

The fit seemed to be passing away, and she fell panting on a sofa, while her eyes lost their fixity, and a cold perspiration broke out on her wrinkled face. But with startling suddenness she sprang to her feet, and with a cry of joy exclaimed:

'He has come, he has come!'

Having uttered these words she once more sank back in an exhausted condition; but thrilling with strange excitement Ethel caught her hand, and asked, pouring out her very soul, as it were, in the question:

'Where is he, Nance?'

'He is at the Woodman's Hut,' answered the old woman slowly, and then she seemed to collapse.

The Woodman's Hut was the chief inn in the village, and, almost beside herself with excitement, Ethel called in a servant to attend to Nance. Then, noiselessly as a shadow, she ran to her own room; for what she had heard was to her a revelation. She hurriedly put on a thick pair of boots; enveloped herself in a huge cloak with a large hood that she drew over her head, and partly concealed her face, and, without one thought of what the consequences might be, she ran down the stairs and slipped out of the house by a side door, and all unknown to anybody.

The snow was falling heavily, the cold air revived her, and for the first time she began to think that she was doing a foolish thing, and being led by a phantom, yet she could not turn back. A something she could not account for seemed to draw her on. If her act was an act of madness she could not help it. She must go. The village was a mile off, and like a phantom herself she hurried along the country road. It was not likely she would meet anyone on that

stormy Christmas night, for even the most depraved found shelter at such a time, and no honest people were likely to be abroad. But even if she should meet any of the neighbours or villagers, she had no fear of being recognised. It was a strange adventure for a young woman, but she did not pause to think whether she was right or wrong. All she knew was that some vague hope of seeing her beloved brother, whom she had not seen for ten long years, lured her on.

She reached the village at last. All was silent. The yew trees at the cottage doors looked like veritable ghosts. The snow pattered softly down, and lay in unsullied whiteness on the streets. The door of the Woodman's Hut was closed, but a cheery, ruddy light from the great, diamond-paned window of the kitchen streamed out across the snow-covered roadway. Now her courage failed her. Was she not bent on a foolish mission? Supposing the gabblings of old Nance were nothing more than gabblings, would she not look very foolish if she presented herself at the inn, which was her father's property, and the tenant her father's tenant? What excuse could she make? What could she say? She, the daughter of a baronet and lord of the manor, to be there on such a night at such an hour for no better reason than that she had heard something uttered by an old woman in a trance! The ridiculousness of the situation struck her, so that she was actually turning away, when a man came out of the doorway of the inn. She recognised him as the boots, and with a sudden impulse, as she drew the hood of her cloak closer about her face, she accosted him, and asked:

'Have you a strange gentleman staying in the house?'

'Yes, mum.'

Her heart leapt into her mouth, and she had to struggle to keep down her excitement as she asked the next question:

'Do you know his name?'

'He gave the name of Richardson, mum.'

Her hopes sank a little.

'Do you know where he has come from?'

'No, mum; but I think he's kind of a foreign gent. But he's very ill and looks as if he was going to die.'

Ethel almost cried out, the inn seemed to be swimming before her eyes, and she actually reeled so that she clutched the man's arm.

'Take me to this strange gentleman, and I will give you a sovereign,' she murmured.

The boots was much astonished, but the thoughts of a sovereign put everything else out of his head; so he pushed open the inn door and led her in, trying to get a glimpse of her face as she came into the light. Down the long passage he led her, and up the stairs to the first landing, where he was going to knock at a door, but she stopped him by grasping his arm.

'Is this his room?' she asked.

'Yes, mum, it's his sitting-room.'

'Thank you, that will do,' she said. Then with trembling hands she opened her purse, took therefrom a sovereign and put it into the man's hand.

'You can leave me now.'

Boots was amazed at her strange conduct. There was a mystery going on, he thought, and he was curious to know what it was, so he stayed at the bottom of the stairs.

The poor girl, feeling faint and weak, tapped lightly at the door. A man's voice called out: 'Come in.' She turned the handle and entered. Seated in a chair before a blazing fire was a heavily bearded man. A huge fur rug was about his shoulders, and his cheeks were hollow, his face was wan and pale.

With a low cry Ethel sprang forward, and, falling on her knees, uttered the one word:

'Wilfrid!'

The man seemed amazed, and his white face became whiter.

'What does this mean?' he stammered.

'You are Wilfrid Woofenden,' she moaned, looking up into

his sunken eyes. 'Not the same I knew ten long years ago, but my heart tells me you are my brother.'

'And you are——?'

'Ethel, your sister.'

A great sob broke from the man, and then he flung his arms around her, and they sobbed together, all unconscious that, peering in at the doorway, was the amazed boots, looking as if he 'had been galvanised.' But he recognised Ethel now, and, tearing down the stairs, he rushed breathless into his master's presence, and exclaimed:

'Master, master, what think you? The strange gentleman up there is no other than young Mister Wilfrid, from the Hall, and Miss Ethel is along with him.'

The brother and sister remained locked in each other's arms for some minutes. Then Wilfrid briefly told her in outline his adventures.

He had wandered the wide world over. He had been nigh unto death in India with jungle fever. He had been shipwrecked off the Cape of Good Hope on his way home. A relapse of illness sent him into the hospital at the Cape, where he was tenderly nursed. Then, feeling that his days were numbered, he came back to the old country, for he wanted to see the dear faces once more. He did not, however, intend to make himself known. He had no fear of being recognised, for he was utterly changed. His intention was to go to the Hall on the following day, under an assumed name, and say that he had known Wilfrid in India. He relied upon the hospitable season for being admitted. Then when he had once again looked upon the old place and the faces of those who were still dear to him, he was going back to India never to return.

Old Nance's trance, clairvoyance, second sight, or whatever it was, had upset all this; and in half an hour Ethel had her brother comfortably seated in a fly provided by the landlord of the inn, and then they drove to the Hall, alighting before they reached the gate. Ethel smuggled her

brother in, and the butler, who had been many years in the family, and had always been very fond of Wilfrid when he was a boy, was taken into confidence. The wanderer was led to the library, Sir Wilfrid being with his guests. Then Ethel hurried upstairs to change her boots and take off her wet cloak, and having arranged her ruffled hair she went to the drawing-room.

On her father's face a frown had gathered at her entrance.

'Where have you been to?' he asked. 'You have been missed and hunted for, but could not be found.'

'I have been doing a solemn duty, sir,' she said; 'and I have something to say to you. Will you please to come with me to the library?'

Then she beckoned her sister, and the three went to the library together. Ethel entered first. Wilfrid was sitting on the sofa looking very ill indeed. The old Baronet was amazed at the presence of a stranger, but some intuition told Muriel who it was. Ethel took her brother's hand, and bringing it to her father's she said:

'Father, this is your erring son. God has sent him here to-night to crave your forgiveness.'

The Baronet fairly staggered, and with a passionate gesture drew his hand away.

'What is this mockery?' he growled angrily.

'It is no mockery, father,' answered Ethel solemnly, while Muriel folded her brother in her arms with a great cry of joy. 'Father,' continued Ethel, 'the ringers rang the bells in the village church this morning. "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men."' She could say no more. For a moment or two the old man seemed undecided. Then, with a gulp in his throat, he grasped his son's hand, and in a raspy voice exclaimed:

'You are my son. There shall be peace and goodwill between us. I pray God to forgive me as I now forgive you.'

Ethel slipped out of the room. In a few minutes she returned with her arm linked in that of Hester Branscombe.

'Hester,' she whispered, 'the wanderer has returned. The lost sheep has come back to the fold. This is Wilfrid, my brother, and once your lover.'

With a cry Hester sank down and covered her face with her hands. Wilfrid raised her up.

'Hester,' he said tenderly, 'do not hate me, and believe me when I solemnly vow that I have never ceased to love you.'

'Nor I you,' she murmured.

That memorable Christmas night the Angel of Sorrow departed from Pine Tree Hall, as the Angel of Joy entered with this unbidden guest. To old Nance was due the reconciliation, for it was owing to her strange, and even miraculous, power that Wilfrid was there, and she was called in to share the joy. But for long months the wanderer hovered between life and death, for his health had been much shattered. But with such nurses and such prospects dying was out of the question, and slowly health came back, and before the next new year was many weeks old he led Hester Branscombe to the altar. He had sinned and had been guilty of much folly, but he had purged his sin by suffering and anguish, and the joy was the greater in contrast to the sorrow that all had endured.

It was a singular thing that old Nance never had another trance. But a little while before the Christmas following the one when she told of Wilfrid's coming, she was found dead in her bed. She had died in the night, calmly and without a pang. The family were inconsolable for her loss, and over her grave in the sweet village churchyard they erected a column of pure white marble, on which was carved this line:

Here sleeps one of the most faithful of servants.

X

THE CHINA DOG

A PHYSICAL PROBLEM

MEN say I am mad—men *think* I am so, else why do they fasten me here? why entomb me in this dismal charnel house? why condemn me to suffer a living death? I listen to the songs of the birds as they chant their melodies in the trees outside. I can hear the sighing of the wind; I can see the moon, and the sun, and the stars; but all these things are not for me. I am dead yet live.

Men have pointed at me, and called me weird, gloomy, mysterious. But I have not always been so. Time was when I could laugh as others laugh; when the smell of flowers, the songs of birds, and the music of rippling waters gladdened my heart; when sleep was not a curse—life a mockery.

Would you like to hear my story? Listen patiently and I will tell it to you. It may be that the narrative will be a little incoherent and wild, for I find it difficult to string my thoughts together. But what of that? I *know* that I shall awaken some responsive memory in your breast.

Let me begin. I go into the dim, mysterious past. Time: The gloaming of a fitful day in chill October. The scene: A wood, solemn and deep. The lingering light falls through the overarching boughs, and weaves fantastic shadows on the green sward.

There is a strain of melody—low, but sweet; 'tis the evening hymn of the birds; the same grand symphony that rose from Eden ages ago.

I linger amid the shadows; I drink in the rich, pure air; I am reckless of the future, I live only in the present; I am happy even in my solitude.

The dying sun sinks lower. His shafts of red smite the clouds, until trees and sward glow in living, crimson light. Then gradually the leaves turn to bronze as the rose-light fades. The sun goes down in a bank of clouds, and an ashen hue is over all things. The bird melody ceases; a silence that is not a silence reigns through the leafy aisles. Still my heart is light. Not a care rests there at this moment. I am free. I am young. Life lies before me. The world is beautiful.

As I stand with the hush of the October night around me, I am startled by the appearance of a woman. Woman was the blight on Paradise. Why did this woman come to me? She is young in years. Her face is attractive, and yet very far from beautiful. Meeting, as we did, in that quiet, lonely wood, what wonder that I should address her, or that she should politely accept my offer to be her escort homeward?

We chatted freely upon such subjects as thoughtful men and women love. We stepped out of the cold, conventional region of formality, and talked as if we had been old acquaintances.

I found her mind well stored with useful knowledge, but it was not the knowledge derived from travel, nor experience gained of men and manners in various parts of the world. The result was, as it invariably is with such people, that she was a confirmed bigot, with curiously distorted notions of the world she lived in.

Arguments were unavailing to change any opinion she had once formed; and though an opponent might talk her into silence, no amount of logic could convince her. She was melancholy and morbid in disposition, and, for a woman of

her years, strangely lethargic. Her nature was cold and hard; and she was totally wanting in that nerve energy which gives mental warmth and life to man or woman.

We loitered on our way, and when I left her darkness had closed in.

As I took my way towards my home, heavy drops of rain began to fall, which were quickly followed by startling peals of thunder and brilliant electrical coruscations.

Being some distance from any house, I was forced to take shelter beneath the trees.

At that time the woman I had just left was nothing more to me than any other person with whom I might have enjoyed a chance and brief acquaintance. She certainly did not belong to the type of those who enslave men at first sight. We had met and parted, but though I tried to dismiss her from my mind I could not succeed. I saw her face every time the lightning caused the trees to appear in shadowy outline. If I turned from the spot where I had last seen it, I saw it where I was then looking. It haunted me, and though I shut my eyes I could not shut out her face.

I found myself unconsciously associating her dry, harsh voice with the metallic sound of the falling rain as it beat upon the leaves, and the chill wind that blew into my face I likened to her nature.

Perhaps my lonely situation, being in the midst of a wood during the thunderstorm, had a depressing effect. At any rate, I know that a strange melancholy fastened upon me, and I wished that I had never met that woman. In spite of the strongest mental effort, I could not shake off a growing conviction that she would in some way influence my future destiny.

I was young, ambitious, enthusiastic, with strong mental and physical energy, which I did not doubt would enable me ultimately to take a fair position amongst my fellow-men.

I had had many sorrows in my early life, but there had come a year or two of sunshine that had almost dissipated

the shadows of the past. But this woman had brought back the blackness again; her face conjured up ghosts of dead memories, until the book of my life, which I had prayed might never more be opened, appeared to my mental vision, and I read the record that I thought had been blotted out with tears of youthful follies, of disappointed hopes, of lost opportunities, and, above all, of a *dead love*. When I turned from the volume of bitterness towards what future might be mine, I saw the 'Steep of Fame,' which I hoped to climb, but between it and me stood the form of the woman I had met that night, and, with a cruel light in her eyes, she barred my progress upward.

The storm gradually died away. One by one the stars came out, cold and glittering. The wind had faded to a fitful sigh, and the only sounds I heard were the occasional twitter of a bird as it started in its sleep, and the melancholy drip, drip, drip of the rain as it drained from the foliage of the trees.

As I hurried quickly homeward, I made a mental vow that I would in no way seek to renew the acquaintance of the woman who had exerted such a strange influence over me. But the more I tried to banish her from my thoughts the stronger grew the conviction she was my Fate, my Doom, my Skeleton.

There is a limited class of deep and earnest thinkers who maintain that man is not altogether a free agent, but is subject to influences—good or evil—against which he is powerless to wrestle; that in proportion to the acquirements of knowledge, and the broadening of his views which observations and travel cannot fail to effect, he will gradually reject the dogmas of his youth, and, launching himself on the ocean of speculation, will drift away to darkness or light. But though he may see destruction ahead, he is as powerless to avert it as he would be to stay the sun on its diurnal course.

I boldly avow myself a disciple of this teaching. I say that men are slaves to Fate; and though we may somewhat pervert a destiny we cannot avoid it. This may seem a

strange phantasm, but the student of psychology will know how much truth it contains.

But why should I dwell on this? Better to hurry to the sequel of my story.

Twelve months passed, during which I saw nothing of the woman who had so strangely influenced me on the night of the storm; and, excepting in a very vague way, I had almost ceased to think of her. Then we met again. I had been invited to spend the evening with a party of friends on some festive occasion, and on my arrival I was surprised to find that she was a guest. Our host was about to introduce us, when I saved him the trouble by crossing the room and taking her hand, which she proffered freely.

'Miss Norah and I have met before,' I observed, and then, noticing the look of astonishment on my host's face, I added quickly, 'Oh, we were casual acquaintances a year ago now.'

It was strange that the light of her eyes and the touch of her hand produced the same agitation from which I had suffered on the occasion of our former meeting.

After our first greetings, I tried during the remainder of the evening to avoid her; but she fascinated me, enthralled me, bound my soul in fetters that I could not break. Once more I became her escort home, and that night when I left her I was her slave.

Did I love her?

Does the slave love his master? Does the caged tiger that is taught to perform before a gaping crowd love its keeper? Does the bird love the serpent that fascinates it?

Three months passed and we met again.

It was in the winter time, and the ice-bound earth was typical of her own frozen nature. Our meeting was totally unexpected. We were both invited to a skating party. The surprise of each was unfeigned on meeting the other. Again I tried to avoid her—again I was powerless. I do not think she sought me; I am certain I did not seek her, and yet we constantly came together.

When we were parting that night I pressed my lips to hers for the first time. She returned my kiss, but hers was cold, passionless. It was the kiss of a statue, whose lips moved by some ingenious mechanism; but the emotional warmth of a loving woman was not there.

We met frequently after this. I felt that the die was cast and I must abide by the hazard of it.

I soon discovered that her theological views were painfully narrowed, and she affected a stoicism that was unwomanly. I saw all this, I tried to break off the connection, but my efforts to free myself resulted in my becoming more securely entangled in the web into which I had fluttered. A few short months and she became my wife. I am sure our wedding was unlike other weddings. There were no smiles, no flowers, no bright dresses, no bells, no sunshine. It was a dull, ashen morning, and the church was filled with a cold, damp mist.

Why did I select such a day?

It was not my choice, it was Fate's.

From the moment that I left the church portals, the shadows commenced to gather over my path in life.

My wife and I went on the Continent to spend the honeymoon. To others this period generally means a few brief weeks of unalloyed pleasure. To me it was a month of vexation, disappointments, and crosses.

In two or three days' time it seemed that I had been married for years. Our tastes were totally dissimilar. There was no sympathy in common between us. She grew more and more lethargic, more prosaic, narrower minded.

She made no effort to give me pleasure. She discovered and magnified all my faults, but closed her eyes to whatever virtues I might have possessed.

I tried so hard, so earnestly to win her heart, her confidence, her woman's trust; but I totally failed. Not that I was without faults, or even thought so. On the contrary, I was keenly alive to the angularities of my character. But there were so many of them that a loving hand might have

smoothed away. I asked this woman to do it. She refused; and so the breach widened; we drifted further and further from each other in mind, but the law had chained us, and the bond was inseparable. My dream of future greatness faded. I saw that my hopes of gaining a high social position would never be realised. It was impossible to raise her, and so I was dragged into the depths of moral gloom that she occupied. I grew callous, became indifferent to those things that most men struggle for.

Ah! how often have I asked how it was that this woman was so blind? Was it a disease? *Was she responsible for her actions?*

I have been all through life a home-lover. I had fancied that the domestic circle was a safe shelter from the world's care. How cruelly I was deceived!

Was I harsh, cruel, intemperate, indifferent?

No!

Was I unmindful of her pleasures, her welfare?

No!

I ask the questions, and I answer them truly before high heaven.

Wherein, then, lay the cause of our misery?

In a distorted view of life—in a frozen nature that nothing could thaw. Not mine, but hers!

Two years passed: my loveless home and close application to work produced their effect, and I became a valetudinarian.

Change of scene and air were absolutely necessary. I went abroad, and my wife accompanied me.

We continued to travel for a considerable time, but I derived little or no benefit. My Skeleton was goading me on to madness or death.

Somebody has said that 'There is an unknown history of our own lives for wise purposes concealed from us in this world, but which it may be our privilege in another existence to learn.' Shall we then know in what degree we have been really loved

by others, or disliked? Moreover, shall we know why others *have* disliked us?

If ever there was a time when I needed the kindly ministration of a gentle hand, the soothing consolation of a loving voice, it was at this period of my travels. They might have saved me then from toppling into the gulf of mental darkness, but neither the hand nor the voice came, and I was lost.

My wife grew colder and more indifferent; my existence became a burden.

One stage of our journey we had been travelling all day in a 'diligence,' when towards evening the axle of the vehicle broke, and we were overturned on the very verge of an awful precipice. This accident had its effect upon nerves, strung already to the very highest tension, and, though my wife and I received but a few trifling bruises, the mental shock to both was very great.

As night had closed in, and it was impossible to obtain another vehicle then, or get our own in such a condition as to enable us to resume our journey, we decided to walk on about two miles to the nearest village, which we reached, tired, jaded, and in an alarming state of nervous excitement.

The place could boast of but one hostelry, and that of the poorest description; but there was no choice, and so we were forced to accept such shelter as the village afforded.

There was an air of settled melancholy about the house that was most depressing. A dingy waiter stood in the passage as we entered, but he seemed incapable of moving, having grown into a chronic state of inactivity through waiting so long for somebody to wait upon.

An asthmatical old woman showed us to our sleeping apartment. It was a large, square, draughty, ghostly place, and, as I crossed the threshold, I fairly shuddered, for a great shadow seemed to fall upon me. The paper was peeling off the walls in long rolls, and from the ceiling cobwebs, that apparently had been undisturbed for years, hung down in

festoons. The carpet on the floor was old and faded; the curtains at the windows dusty and time-stained.

The feeling engendered on entering this neglected apartment was such as one experiences on crossing the threshold of a tomb that has been shut up for years.

The air was heavy with the smell of dampness and decay. There was not one redeeming feature in the place. An old-fashioned clothes-press was gradually going to pieces in one corner. The four bare poles of a curtainless bedstead rose in the centre of the room like the spars of a battered ship. A sofa affected with rick in the joints, and a few consumptive-looking chairs completed the furniture.

Thinking that a fire would impart a little comfort to the cheerless place, I called for the chamber-maid. She appeared in the person of the asthmatical old woman, who used every effort to kindle some wood in the grate, but without avail, for there was no draught in the chimney, and the smoke came back into the room in clouds; and after a few fitful splutters the flame from the wood, for want of oxygen, went out.

When the old woman, who in despair abandoned the attempt to produce a fire, had left the room, I threw myself on the sofa, thoroughly heart-sick and weary. As I lay there, my eyes wandered to the shelf over the fireplace, and then for the first time I noticed there was a cracked mirror, and in front of this mirror a large china dog. It was a white dog, with painted black eyes and a red mouth, from which a portion of the tongue protruded. There was nothing extraordinary about this ornament, excepting that it was unusually large, and thickly coated with dust. And yet, as my gaze rested on it, I became visibly affected. This painted bit of china had a strange fascination over me in my morbidly nervous condition.

It fretted and irritated me; it *alarmed* me. How, or why, I know not.

Unable longer to stand the fixed stare of its painted eyes, I rose, and, telling my wife that I was faint and would walk

about outside the house till she had finished unpacking, I left the room. As I traversed the passage, I noticed the mouldy waiter still standing there. It seemed as if he had not changed his position in the least. His hands were crossed, and his face wore an air of settled melancholy that was heightened by the sickly yellow glare of a lamp suspended by an iron chain from the ceiling.

I passed into the road, and the night wind blew refreshingly cool on my heated forehead.

On the other side of the roadway was a long row of tall trees, and a low stone wall separated them from a river, whose black waters flowed along with a dismal, moaning sound.

I crossed over and seated myself upon the wall, in the shadow of the trees.

No living soul passed up or down the roadway as I sat there. Save for the fitful glimmer of the lamp in the hotel passage, there were no indications of human life, and even that I likened to a watch-lamp at the portals of a tomb.

The horrible moaning of the sullen river, and the ghostly creaking of the branches of the trees were the only sounds that broke the otherwise deathlike stillness of the place, and even they only served to make the stillness more noticeable.

How long I sat there I know not, but it must have been a considerable time, for when I rose I was damp with the dew, and chilled to the bone. An unaccountable feeling of depression had taken possession of me. I was melancholy, and there was a burning desire to weep—to weep passionate, scalding tears; but this relief was denied me.

As I passed into the hotel I noticed that the waiter had moved at last; he was sitting in a chair that stood in the passage. He was asleep, but it seemed like the sleep of death, for his mouth was open, and his eyes were only partly closed.

I went upstairs, and on reaching the landing found the place in darkness. Then, for the first time, I became conscious of the fact that I was *not alone*. There was another *presence* with me. Not a substantial, palpable being, but a

faintly luminous, transparent figure of *myself*. From this figure I looked upon my own body. I saw my own face—oh, so ghastly, so haggard, so pitiful! In my eyes there was such a pleading, such a yearning, for love—a wife's love, a wife's tenderness.

I groped my way along the gloomy corridor to my chamber. I determined to throw myself at my wife's feet, to implore her to comfort me, to give me sympathy, to save me from myself.

I opened the door. The candle had burnt low in the socket, and the room was in partial gloom.

The bed was tenantless. My wife had not undressed, but was seated on the sofa, her head buried in her hands.

I thought that she was weeping, and my astonishment was great, for she had repeatedly told me she could never weep. I had often been impressed with the idea that if she could but find relief in a flood of tears her frozen nature would thaw, that her heart would throb with warm, healthful, loving life.

As I saw her now in an attitude of seeming grief, I felt that my wishes were realised, and that the moment had arrived when I could prove to her that I could forget myself and find pleasure only in ministering to her comfort.

I crossed quickly to where she was seated. I was about to throw my arms around her neck, when she raised her head.

Would to heaven I could blot out the memory of her face as I saw it then!

It was inhuman in its look of withering hate—it was inhuman in its ashen hue.

There were no tears there, but the eyes glowed with an unnatural metallic lustre.

I recoiled from her in horror. My heart seemed to stand still.

'You are a fiend!' she shrieked, 'an inhuman monster! You placed that dog there to haunt me. I dare not go near it, and it will not move. Oh! would to God that I were dead!'

She pointed as she spoke to the china dog on the mantelpiece that had attracted my own attention.

I saw in an instant that she was suffering from a violent fit of hysterics, no doubt the result of the shock sustained through the carriage accident, and which had been intensified by the ghostly air of this comfortless apartment.

Thinking she would be better in a recumbent position, I placed my arms around her waist with a view of lifting her on to the bed. But she struggled with almost superhuman strength, and dug her nails into my flesh until I fairly writhed with pain.

I dragged her over to the fireplace, at the side of which hung a bell-rope. I seized this rope, thinking to summon assistance, but the thing was rotten with age, and came away in my hand.

Nerved by desperation I struggled for some time with the frenzied woman, whose grip I could not loosen, until she became fairly exhausted. Then I managed to take off her travelling dress, lay her upon the bed, and bathe her temples with water. She gradually grew calmer, and in a little while sank into a fitful slumber. I was now fairly worn out. The excitement had kept me up for a little while, but that having passed, all my strength seemed to leave with it, and with difficulty I managed to get off my coat and throw myself upon the bed. At this moment the candle expired with a gasp, but as it did so, a strange, weird, unearthly light pervaded the apartment. It was a sort of luminous mist through which I could discern the things in ghostly outline.

Whether this was a fearful reality, or merely imagination owing to a disordered state of the brain, I leave others to judge. I have my own idea. I know what *I* believe. Presently this light grew stronger. It seemed to radiate from a given point near the fireplace. I turned towards the spot, and my gaze rested upon the china dog. With horror, I saw that the light came from this ornament. Its body was giving off luminous phosphoric gleams. I might, in my own mind,

have accounted for this extraordinary phenomenon by some natural law of chemistry, had it not been for what followed. *The head of the brute moved*, and its eyes became like living coals. They glared, and gradually changed in colour to blood red. They glared *on me*, until I seemed to wither before their scorching gaze. I was fascinated with horror. I could not move, I could not cry out, I could not even close my eyes to the fearful apparition.

In a little while my sufferings were increased by a new torture. Huge spiders with fiery eyes commenced to lower themselves from the ceiling. They lowered themselves until they reached my body; then they bound me with webs as fine as silk, but as strong as chains of iron. These fearful gyves burned into my flesh, they tortured me with the torture of the damned, and the burning eyes of the fiendish dog seared my very soul. I could endure it no longer. With an effort that was superhuman I burst the bonds that bound my arms, and turned to my wife. I touched her, but she moved not; I called her by her name, but she spoke not; I looked at her, and by the weird light that pervaded the apartment I observed that her face was stony and fixed. The eyes were open, but glazed. *She was dead.*

I know that at that moment I uttered a shriek that reverberated strangely through the dismal building. I struggled with the might of a giant to free myself from the webs of the spiders. I succeeded, and seizing the poker from the fireplace, aimed a terrific blow at the dog. There was a crash, the strange light vanished, but at that moment the door of the room opened, and unknown faces appeared. They were the faces of men and women, and they grinned horribly at me. I sprang at them with my weapon. There was a short struggle, and I believe I was overcome by the demons, who filled every corner of the room.

There was a long, long blank. Years must have passed: but that I know not. I remember a mass of things, but nothing definite. 'Tis all a haze, an incoherent dream.

I found myself at last in this strange room, the walls of which are padded. I was, as I am now, a prisoner; and when I ask my stern captors why they do not let me go forth into the world again, they answer me with a cruel smile, and shake their heads. Why am I deprived of liberty? Alas! I know not. A moth flutters around my lamp. The poor insect is fascinated, as I once was. I stretch forth my hands to save it. Too late! Its wings are scorched; it flutters to the table; it writhes, and dies.

This tiny thing is typical of my own life in all save that *I* live.

Such is my story, and I am waiting patiently for the time when I *shall* be free, and men will no longer say that I am mad.

XI

THE HAUNTED MAN

A STRANGE CASE

I AM a medical practitioner, resident in a little country town in Cumberland; but my practice for many years has been an uncertain one, and necessarily very scattered; for the country round about is sparsely populated, the population for the most part being farmers and country gentry. The patients amongst this class are not many, for country gentry and farmers, as a rule, are a very healthy lot. Occasionally I have had to make long journeys over the moors and mountains to visit some sick person; for, with the exception of myself and two colleagues in the town, there was, until comparatively recently, no other doctor near for many miles. Mine is the oldest practice, as I have been established for thirty years; and in any special or sudden case I am, or rather was, summoned (for my son has succeeded me generally in the country work). I am too old for long journeys now. A country doctor's life is invariably a very active one, and he hasn't much time left him, either for recreation or study; that is, book study, I mean. But his opportunities for studying the book of life and the human heart are unique. The country parson is supposed to see a good deal of the inner and seamy side of human nature, but the country doctor sees much more than comes under the notice of the parson. Human nature

is inherently hypocritical, and it may be doubted if there is anything in connection with this mortal life in which human beings are so hypocritical as in matters of religion. To the parson they affect a piety and sincerity they do not possess. He sees only the smooth and Sunday exterior of his parishioners; but the doctor's calling brings him in contact with people who appear before him in their true colours. It is in the sick chamber that the higher as well as the meaner qualities of the mind make themselves manifest. Sickness tests the devotion and love of friends and relatives, while it brings out all that is mean, covetous, selfish, irritable, and cowardly in the patient.

The doctor, being admitted behind the scenes, learns a good deal of these things. He sees the lady without the dye on her hair, the padding in her stays, and the rouge on her cheeks; and the man *sans* that everyday boldness and independence which characterise him when in health. The experiences, indeed, of a country doctor of any standing, or, for the matter of that, of any medical practitioner, are extraordinary, and he could tell stories which, for strangeness, would surpass the wildest imaginings of the fictionist. Fortunately, however, for the world generally, the doctor's secrets are his own. He recognises an unwritten code of honour, which is more severe than the laws of the Medes and Persians, and the secrets of the sick chamber he carries to his grave. Let it not be supposed, therefore, that I am going to prove an exception to the wholesome rule governing a doctor's conduct. But the story I have to tell betrays no such secrets as those I have hinted at. As a matter of fact, it reveals some most remarkable psychological phenomena that I should have been wanting in duty had I failed to make public.

I am afraid that my readers will be inclined to accuse me of some prolixity in the foregoing remarks. I will, therefore, plunge at once *in medias res*.

One evening I had just sat down to dine with my family

after a somewhat harassing day, when my servant handed me a visiting card on which was the inscription,

Mrs. Mabel Augusta Woodhall.

'Have you shown the lady into the waiting-room?' I asked.

'Yes, sir, and she says you are not to disturb yourself, as she is not in a hurry.'

I was glad to hear this, as the craving of nature was keen, and I really wanted my dinner badly, so I proceeded to discuss it leisurely. I could not help speculating, however, as to why I had been honoured with a visit from Mrs. Mabel Augusta Woodhall. I had not the pleasure of the lady's acquaintance, but knew her by repute, for in the country one gets to know by gossip a good deal of one's neighbours for many miles around. I was aware that Mrs. Woodhall was a young and, gossip said, handsome woman, who had been recently married to Ralph Abercrombie Woodhall, a country gentleman, said to be wealthy, but who had long been notorious for his eccentricities. In fact, all his family bore that reputation; and people used to speak of his father as being 'a bit off his head,' while some of the simple yokels had it that old Woodhall was on intimate terms with the Evil One. Such absurd stories as this, of course, are not uncommon in country districts. The late Mr. Woodhall, however, had certainly been peculiar enough to justify almost any belief in the rustic mind. One of his peculiarities was that he used to ride about the countryside frequently all night long. He was never known to enter a church, and he drank heavily, at any rate, so it was alleged, though I never heard of his being seen in a state of intoxication. But the tattle was that he used to lie in bed all day drinking, and rode about at night to get sober.

His end certainly was curious enough, and to the country folk was confirmation strong of their belief in the stories current. It appears that he was found dead one morning

sitting in his chair. He had always been a robust man, and had never ailed anything. His awfully sudden death, therefore, caused a sensation in the neighbourhood. One of my colleagues, Doctor Budd, who was called in to certify to the cause of death, told me that the old man's face bore a look of fixed, stony horror such as he had never seen on the face of a dead man in all his life. But this was not all, for on the forehead, near the left temple, was a peculiar, livid, blue mark about the size of a five-shilling piece. As Doctor Budd could assign no cause of death, the coroner was notified, and an inquest and autopsy ordered. The autopsy was carried out by Doctor Budd and a gentleman from a neighbouring town. And now comes the peculiar part of the story. Every organ in the body was found to be perfectly sound, and the livid blue mark on the forehead did not extend below the skin. There was absolutely nothing, so far as medical science could determine, to account for the death, and the verdict was, 'Died by the visitation of God.'

The son, Ralph, who had been abroad for many years, having quarrelled with his father, so it was said, returned home on the old man's death, and took possession of the estate. The residence was a fine old country mansion, situated in a lonely but beautiful district, and bearing the extraordinary name of 'Pole Star Hall.' The first thing he did was to turn his mother and sister out of the Hall, and they took up their residence in a small house on the estate. Then he went to London, was absent about six months, and came back with a wife.

All these things had reached me as items of common gossip in the community, but they had faded out of my memory, and I had heard nothing of the eccentric owner of Pole Star Hall for a long time. Now as I looked at the visiting card bearing Mrs. Mabel Augusta Woodhall's name, I was naturally curious to know what had brought her to me.

Having finished my dinner, I went to the consulting-room, and Mrs. Woodhall rose as I entered. She was a young and good-looking woman, but she had a scared, restless look in her eyes, and her face was pale and worn.

I greeted her cordially, and, motioning her to be seated, remarked that I presumed she had come to consult me professionally.

'Not on my own behalf,' she answered, 'though I am not very well, but it is worry and want of rest that is the matter with me. I have come about my husband, but entirely without his knowledge, and if he knew that I had come I am sure he would be very, very angry. For a long time his behaviour has been most extraordinary, and I have come to the conclusion that he is not in his right mind.'

'Does he complain of anything, madam?'

'No, but he says he is haunted.'

'Ah! that is a bad sign,' I remarked. 'Now, what do you want me to do?'

'I want you to see him, though he must not know that you are a doctor. Whenever I have spoken to him about consulting a doctor it has seemed to arouse him to a paroxysm of fury. He says he is haunted by two demons, who won't let him rest night or day.'

The lady burst into tears, and seemed much agitated. When she grew calmer she proceeded:

'As I am not only afraid of my husband, but consider that he is dangerous to himself, I want to take steps to ascertain the true state of his mind, with a view to getting him confined in an asylum.'

Remembering what I had heard about the father, it did not surprise me to learn that the son's eccentricity had developed into madness. But I saw that if I complied with the lady's request I should be placed in a situation requiring great delicacy and tact.

'Does he not complain of physical illness?' I asked.

'No, he simply says he is haunted; and, what is more, I

am inclined to believe him, for I have seen and heard some most extraordinary things myself.'

I smiled as I asked her what she had seen. But she said she would rather not tell me, because I was certain to be incredulous; but she begged of me to go back with her there and then. She had driven over in the dog-cart, which was waiting at the door.

As I was comparatively free that night, having no urgent cases to visit, I consented to return with her, and in a few minutes was ready to start. As we drove along Mrs. Woodhall particularly impressed upon me the necessity for not making my calling known to her husband, who professed to have an unconquerable antipathy to doctors. I did not care about lending myself to deception, but she urged it upon me so strongly that at last I consented, and it was arranged that I was to be represented as a friend from London, who was well acquainted with her family, and for the nonce my name was to be Mr. Peter Jenkins. I had never set my eyes on Mr. Woodhall, and he did not know me, so that there was no fear of this innocent little deception being discovered at first.

We reached the Hall about eight o'clock, and I was at once shown into the drawing-room, while Mrs. Woodhall went to inform her husband of my arrival. Half an hour later I was ushered into his presence, and, being unprepared for it, I was perfectly staggered by his extraordinary appearance. He was a tall, gaunt, powerful-looking man, with strongly marked features, with hair of a decided tinge of red, and eyes of a cold grey hue. There was a very remarkable restlessness about these eyes, such as one sees sometimes in certain cases of insanity. They seemed incapable of fixing themselves for many seconds at a time on any object. They were, in fact, the eyes of a hunted animal. His face was of a corpse-like pallor, and altogether his appearance was suggestive of a man who was suffering from some deadly fear. To my professional eye the signs I saw indicated mental rather than physical illness.

He rose and greeted me in a quick, hurried manner as I entered, and appeared to be perfectly rational.

'My wife tells me you are from London. Well, you are welcome—very welcome. Sit down. What will you take?'

I thanked him, and said that at present I did not require anything. Then I gradually drew him into conversation, and said at last:

'You must lead a very healthy sort of life in a place like this. The country is charming round about.'

'Yes, yes, but I never go out—at least not often. I have an infirmity which makes life somewhat burdensome.'

'Indeed! But have you not sought the advice of some competent medical man?'

His eyes blazed up at this question; and bringing his heavy hand down with a bang on the chair-arm, he exclaimed irascibly:

'Curse the doctors, no! They are all fraudulent impostors. If you break your neck, or have got anything decidedly the matter with your lungs or heart, or have got a swollen liver, or a carbuncle on your nose, they can tell what's the matter. But go beyond these and they are all in the dark; and then they commence to experimentalise on you, running the whole gamut of the Pharmacopœia in the hope of stumbling by chance on something that will hit your case. No, sir, doctoring is all confounded quackery; and the higher a doctor stands in his profession the greater quack he is.'

This was not very flattering to my *amour propre*, nor to the great healing art I represented. But I simply laughed, and answered:

'You are a little severe.'

'No severer than they deserve. Take my case, now. Supposing I were to call in one of these quacks, what would he do? He would feel my pulse, look at my tongue, and prescribe me a dose of salts and senna.'

'You are a humourist,' I responded, laughing loudly in spite of myself.

'If I am I am so unconsciously, then. If you know anything about doctors you will know what I say is true. There isn't a doctor in the whole country could tell what is wrong with me.'

'Is your disease so deep seated, so novel, that it couldn't be diagnosed?'

'Yes, it is'— here he lowered his voice—'*the fact is I am haunted.*'

He bent towards me as he spoke, and strongly emphasised the last sentence. A laugh of derision trembled on my lips, but died away again before it found utterance, for a *third* voice in a faint treble exclaimed:

'Yes, he is haunted.'

I am free to confess that the effect of this on me was extraordinary. I know that the colour fled from my face, and a cold thrill seemed to shoot through my heart. That voice was in the room, but what part of the room it came from I could not for the life of me have told. The effect was certainly uncanny and startling.

Mr. Woodhall broke into a coarse, bitter sort of laugh as he exclaimed:

'There, do you hear that? That's one of the devils that annoy me. Did you hear it?' he demanded again in a stern tone, as I did not answer immediately.

'I did,' I said, speaking in profound amazement.

He let out a jubilant kind of roar at this, exclaiming:

'By heaven! you are a man after my own heart, and I like you. My wife, who is somewhat of a fool, either won't or can't hear these things, and thinks that I am cracked.'

By this time the effect of the start I had received had passed away, and I began to rate myself as a dull ass, as it occurred to me that Woodhall had deceived me by some shallow ventriloquial trickery.

'I am glad I have gained your goodwill,' I remarked, 'and if you are willing to accept advice from me I should say

you ought to go out more. You should mix in society, attend the county meetings, go to the hunt balls, give parties in your own house, and generally enjoy yourself; for the fact is, you are sinking into a condition of misanthropy.'

His restless eyes sought mine for a second or two, and then he muttered angrily:

'How the devil can a haunted man do that? If you could see with my eyes you would know what I suffer. I'm perfectly well aware that if I were to talk freely about being haunted, people would declare me mad, and clap me into a lunatic asylum. The fact is, my wife thinks I *am* mad, and wants to put me away. But I'm not going to give her the chance. I have nothing to do with her. I keep her from me as much as possible. But I'm awfully lonely. I want companionship. I want a man who understands me. It is impossible to get women to understand these things, they are such a poor, weak lot of fools.'

'So they are,' I answered, wishing to humour him, and growing deeply interested in his case.

He sprang up from his seat, came over to where I sat, and gripped my hands in an iron grasp.

'By God I like you!' he exclaimed; 'you are the first sensible man I've met for years.'

'That must be comforting to you as it flatters me,' I answered, returning his grip, and seizing his wrist in such a way that, unknown to him, I was enabled to feel his pulse. I found it rapid, thready, and irregular, indicating not only mental excitement, but heart disturbance.

'Look here,' he said, 'would you like to have a walk? I haven't been out for some time, but have confined myself to this room until it has grown hateful to me. But the fact is—don't laugh at me—I'm positively afraid to go out alone now. I wouldn't let my wife accompany me, and I can't ask the servants, for very soon the fools would have it all over the country that I was mad, and I tell you, my friend, I am not mad but haunted.'

I was glad of this suggestion of his to go out, and I answered cheerfully:

'Yes, let us go by all means.'

He put on a large cloak and a big slouched hat that gave him somewhat the appearance of an Italian bandit. Then, arming himself with a massive stick that stood in the corner near his chair, he said:

'Come.'

We went down the broad and noble flight of stairs that rose from the centre of an imposing hall. His arm was linked in mine. Mrs. Woodhall had evidently heard us coming, and opened the door of a room in the hall. She looked surprised, of course, but a glance from me warned her, and she said nothing.

As we descended the stone steps of the main entrance, Woodhall said with a growl:

'Do you see how that woman watches me? I can't stir for her.' Then he took off his hat, and exclaimed: 'Ah!—how refreshing that breeze is!'

An avenue of magnificent beech trees ran straight for a hundred yards or so from the entrance to the house to the large iron gates and porter's lodge. The night was dark, though starlight, and a strong breeze played amongst the trees, now rising to a shriek, now dying away in mournful cadence. It was a solemn sort of night and one calculated to impress the most unimpressionable. My strange companion and I walked arm in arm down the avenue for some distance without speaking. He seemed to be drinking in great gulps of the pure, fresh air as it came from the mountain and moorland, and I thought it better not to talk to him for a little time. But suddenly I stopped, for I heard footsteps close behind us. They did not seem to be sounds made by the feet of either man or woman, but the soft footfalls of a child who walked with monotonous regularity. I peered into the darkness, but could see nothing or nobody.

'What is it?' Woodhall asked.

'I thought heard somebody following us,' I said.

He broke into his strange laugh again, as he exclaimed: 'Tut, man, that is one of my familiars. Have I not told you I am haunted? Wherever I go those footsteps follow me.'

I will make no attempt to describe my feelings as he said this; I really began to believe I was being made a fool of by my own senses. He might have deceived me with the voice in the room, but he could not produce these pattering footsteps. We moved on, then I heard the footsteps again. We stopped, they stopped. We went on and they went on, always with a soft pit pat, pit pat, pit pat, like the measured ticking of a great old-fashioned eight-day clock. What was the mystery? I could not repress a shudder, and the trees seemed to shudder in concert as the wind blew through them. If any of my readers should be disposed to think me weak, let him try and imagine the situation: A ghostly sort of night: overhead the stars watching in solemn splendour; rows of tall trees with great masses of foliage through which the wind wailed and sighed; all around dark with a blackness that was impenetrable; and following me some invisible being or thing that made audible footfalls. It was unearthly, it was weird, thrilling.

I walked from side to side of the avenue. I went forward and backward, but discovered nothing that would account for the sounds, which stopped when Woodhall stopped, and came again when he went on. It was only when he moved that I heard them.

To say that I was puzzled would hardly express my state of mind. And I am honest enough to say that I found the scepticism of which I had so long boasted giving place to a feeling of superstition. Certainly here was something which I could not account for, reason how I would. Forward and backward we walked, and forward and backward those ghostly footsteps followed us. I suggested to Woodhall we should go out on the high road. It was not so dark there as in the

avenue where the great trees wrapped everything in shadow. The road was hard and whitish, and it would have been quite easy to have seen another person, had he been there several yards away. But no living thing was in sight, and yet those awful footsteps followed close behind us, with their maddening pit pat, pit pat.

I could no longer wonder at Woodhall's state of mind, for I felt that if I listened to those sounds long I should go mad myself, for their persistency and monotony were terrible.

'Tell me,' I whispered to my companion, 'have you been subjected to this sort of thing long?'

'For about two years.'

'Have you any theory about it?'

'No. I believe, though, my father was haunted in the same way. The torture is unbearable,' he added with a shudder; 'and the worst is I get no sympathy; my wife shuns me and thinks I am mad.'

We walked up and down until I felt that my nerves were becoming unstrung. Absolutely I could endure no longer the sound of those mysterious footfalls, and I suggested that we should go in. He readily complied, and we returned to the house. A servant opened the door, but we saw no one else, and went straight upstairs to Mr. Woodhall's room, where, divesting himself of his coat and hat, he threw himself wearily on the sofa, saying to me:

'I suppose you stay here all night? My wife didn't tell me of your coming. But there, I'm not surprised; she tells me nothing. There is not an atom of sympathy between us.'

He had driven me into a corner, as it were, by his direct question, and, without a barefaced untruth, I did not see how I was to get out of it. But, fortunately, he was so absorbed by his own mournful reflections that he did not give me time to answer, but continued:

'If I could only sleep long and soundly it would be a tremendous relief. But I can't. *They* won't let me. All night long I hear voices and footsteps. Sometimes the voices are

intelligible, at others not, and if I happen to fall asleep a hand roughly shakes and awakens me.'

'Well, now,' I answered, 'I have sometimes been troubled with sleeplessness myself. But I have got a remedy which I always have handy.'

'Have you?' he asked eagerly.

'Yes. Shall I give you a little of it?'

'Yes. I should like to try it,' he answered somewhat hesitatingly.

Turning my back to him, and going to the sideboard I drew out my pocket medicine case, which I always carried with me, and which is indispensable to a country practitioner. I took therefrom a sleeping draught, and, pouring it into a wine-glass, filled it with water, and handed it to him, saying:

'Take this as soon as you get into bed. I am sure it will make you sleep. Now, good-night. We shall meet again to-morrow.'

He shook my hand, and we parted. Mrs. Woodhall met me at the bottom of the stairs, and took me into her sitting-room.

I could not bring myself to tell her what I had heard with my own ears. But I said that I considered her husband was in a very bad way, and wanted watching and companionship. For the present, however, I could express no definite opinion as to his mental condition. It would be necessary for me to see him again three or four times, and promising to return the following day I took my departure.

As I drove home I felt in a perfect state of mystification. The case was one of the most extraordinary I had ever known; and for the first time in my life I that night began to think there were things which could not be accounted for by any known human or natural laws.

The next day I again visited my patient, for so I had a right to regard him. He informed me that he had slept for several hours—the most enjoyable sleep he had had for a long time. He certainly looked refreshed, and I began to

feel hopeful that by a course of treatment, and weaning him from himself, he might be restored to his normal condition again. I therefore ventured very cautiously to suggest that he should have a doctor to attend to him, but he flew into a violent temper. He poured out a volley of abuse on the heads of doctors generally, and said that a doctor would declare him mad at once if he told him that he was haunted, and he would be put into a lunatic asylum. I assured him that I knew a doctor who would not do this, but he vowed that no medical man should come near him.

As I saw that it was hopeless to try and convince him then, and that to discuss the subject further would dangerously excite him, I said no more. In order not to arouse his suspicions I told him I was going to stay in the village for some days as I knew some people there, but that I would come and see him every day. He was pleased at this and I went away.

I need not say I was much puzzled about this strange case. I was tempted to consult with some of my professional brethren, but I felt sure that if I did, and told them of my own experience, they would say that he was mad, and I was as mad as he. I therefore decided not to mention it, but felt it was my duty to speak very plainly to Mrs. Woodhall. And when I told her what I had heard, she burst into weeping, and said :

'I, too, have frequently heard voices and footsteps when I have been with him. But I shrank from telling you this lest you should think that I, too, ought to be confined in an asylum, nor have I ever let him know that I heard them.'

I was more than ever astounded, and could no longer doubt that what I had heard was an actual reality, and not a delusion, for here was confirmation in what Mrs. Woodhall told me. The reader will see at once how extremely difficult it would have been to have convinced anyone else if the person had not had aural proof as I had had. My anxiety about Woodhall was naturally very great, and, while I hesitated to

take any of my colleagues into confidence, I nevertheless felt that it was a duty, from many points of view, to do so. But I resolved at any rate to wait for two or three weeks, and deal with my patient as best I could in the meantime. I was relieved of the necessity, however, of doing so by a terrible and unexpected *dénoûment*. One morning, a fortnight after my first visit, a messenger came post haste from Pole Star Hall, asking me to go without a moment's delay. I went on horseback as fast as my beast would carry me. Mrs. Woodhall met me in the hall. She was weeping bitterly.

'Oh, Doctor,' she moaned, 'I fear he is dead.'

I was shocked at this news, and hurried to his room.

He was sitting in his chair, his head bent forward on his breast, on his face a look of stony horror; but what was more startling, on his temple was a blue, livid mark about the size of a five-shilling piece.

I was dumb in the presence of this awful mystery, which I was utterly powerless to explain. Having been attending him I was enabled to avoid an inquest, and certified his death as due to apoplexy. He had died in the same way as his father, and in that case the verdict had been 'Died by the visitation of God,' which is capable of various interpretations.

For many, many years I have kept the knowledge of this truly remarkable case to myself. But I have come recently to believe that it was no more than my duty to put it on record that it may be classed among those phenomena which utterly elude the grasp of our human comprehension, but which, nevertheless, manifest themselves occasionally to our utter amazement.

After all, we are but little beings, and girt round by the very narrow limits of the finite world of the seen; while the world of the unseen, of which we only occasionally catch very shadowy glimpses, is infinite.

XII

RUTH

A STORY OF ANIMAL MAGNETISM

If I choose to sit here [1] night after night it surely injures no man. If it has been my fancy to rail *her* grave round, and to sit within those railings, it ought not to subject me to ridicule. If it is my whim to come here, that I may enjoy the peace of this 'City of the Dead,' it is an injustice that people should speak of me as 'one a little deranged, but harmless.' Isn't it Bulwer Lytton who says: 'We know the epochs of the world but ill if we examine not their romance. There is as much truth in the poetry of life as in its prose'?

What is this poetry of life? may I ask.

Certainly not the fierce struggle that men enter into with one another in their greed for gain. But when the requirements of the body have been supplied, the soul asserts itself, and in its yearning for knowledge we become sensible of a spiritual element within us. This element gives us a foretaste a higher life, and he who is enabled to break away from

[1] Should the reader recognise the little church herein described, he will know that for a long time one of the objects of interest in the neighbourhood was an old, grey-headed man, who, during the summer, was to be seen sitting every evening within the iron railings enclosing a grave in the churchyard. He died recently, and lies buried close to the grave that had so much attraction for him. His story, as here told, is, in substance, strictly true. The wreck spoken of actually occurred, and the poor boy sleeps between two trees, as described in the story.

the commonplaceness and the vulgarity of a grovelling existence, hears poetry in the wind and the trees and the surging sea; and he sees it in the stars and the flowers, and a thousand other things that most men are blind to. If, in our search for knowledge, we only accept as truth that which we are capable of comprehending, then we reduce ourselves to the level of the brutes. If, on the other hand, we admit that in our narrowed sphere of observation we are as mariners on a raft in the centre of an ocean, seeing nothing of the glories of those lands that lie below the horizon, then we confess ourselves men, with the attributes of gods. Although we are chained to this world by the bondage of the flesh, we may still learn much from inspiration; or will you tolerate my saying by psychical intuition? By that I mean that, if we affect not to disdain the poetry of life, we may, by aid of the mystic light of romance, catch glimpses of the spiritual existence. By *romance*, let it be understood that I mean that which in our smallness of mind we reject as untrue because our comprehension fails to grasp it.

My story, I know, is a strange one, but it is entitled to credence, albeit it is mystical. If I sit here in this solemn place it is for the sake of the companionship of her whose body is beneath my feet, but whose spirit holds communion with me. I prefer the solemn company of the dead to the wearying, idle chatter of the living. I love this solitude. It suits me well after a long life of feverish restlessness. For me the spot is hallowed and haunted. Many ages ago Nature hereabouts rent her bosom by some convulsive sob. The natives call these dells 'chines.' It is a pretty name. Now, as you see, the same awful power that rent the rocks and earth has hidden the traces of its fury, and a thousand beauties clothe the rift. Sheltered from the nipping winds flowers bloom perennially, and the graceful ferns grow in luxurious profusion. Here and there the disrupted rocks, moss-covered and green with the growth of countless ages, give an air of savage grandeur to the dell; while below, at a

fearful depth, the awful sea, green and flaky in its wrath, roars on the hard, white sand, and beats itself against the black iron cliffs. The silence of this spot of enchantment is unbroken, save for that roar of the sea and the moan of the wind. But the sea does not always roar, nor the wind moan. There is a strange peace then, and in yonder wood a sad nightingale at times sings sweetly.

Sometime in the far-off past a church was built. Its builders must have planted it in this solitude in order that when the sea was angry they might in its very presence lift up their voices to the God at Whose command even the waves sink to sleep.

The church is a tiny square-towered, low-roofed place, the stonework now completely hidden by the enfolding ivy. Around this sacred shrine, shut in by a low, moss-covered wall, they who once worshipped at its altar now take their rest. Over them wave the tall trees, and below them moans the sea.

It is truly a City of the Dead, beautiful but solemn, and withal filled with saddened memories, for see those two aged trees whose branches interlace. Between their two massive trunks is a white slab placed over the remains of a youth who was the sole support of a widowed mother. All England shuddered as it read the pathetic story of his death. It was his first voyage, and he was returning from some far distant port, when one winter's night, when he was in sight of home, an angry wind drove his ship on to those rocks below; and the cruel waves, sparing older lives, flung the mangled body of that poor child on the white shore. They buried him there between those trees, and he sleeps quietly enough now within sound of the sea that slew him.

Such is the spot of beauty situated within a few hours' ride of the great Metropolis. It is a fitting resting-place for her whose story I have to tell. She loved the sea, loved it in all its moods; and when it was most angry she used to say it was most sublime.

Our meeting was commonplace enough, but the results of that meeting were truly incomprehensible.

Her name was Ruth. She and I had been invited to spend the evening at the house of a mutual friend. She was one of a number of young ladies—a merry party, full of life, joy, and happiness; she, perhaps, the merriest of the lot. Pressing engagements prevented my joining them until the evening had far advanced. The company were nearly all strangers to me, and as I entered the room I received a general introduction. My eyes quickly wandered from face to face until they rested on Ruth's. What was the power that fixed them there—that caused me to stare rudely until she blushed scarlet and turned her head away?

If Death—in the shape we represent him, a ghastly skeleton brandishing his spear—had entered the room and summoned her to immediately surrender up her soul, her face could not have grown more livid than it did immediately after she had averted her head. The red went and the white came as suddenly as it would have done if a powerful electric shock had been sent through the heart; and from the instant I gazed upon her her fate was as surely sealed as if she had been stricken with a plague.

That woman was to die—die through me. Yet in what way was I responsible for her death?

We had come together by accident—I possessing some weird power of fascination: she filled with a fatal susceptibility. Our eyes met, and that instant the chain was riveted. Was she the victim of animal magnetism? We know that such a power exists. To deny it would be a matter not of faith but obstinate ignorance.

Ruth's personal appearance was interesting. She was well formed, and her face, by no means handsome, was nevertheless striking, and arrested one's attention in an unusual way. A pretty face has a natural attractiveness, but the attractiveness of Ruth's face was not that of prettiness. To say exactly what it was would be difficult from any casual inquiry. So

far as her features were concerned, they were exceedingly pleasing. She had a well-shaped mouth, though it lacked firmness; her nose was straight; her forehead, for a woman, large; her complexion was a soft olive, delicately blended with red. Her hair, extraordinarily profuse, was, in colour, a rich dark, glossy brown; in texture fine and silky, with a natural wave. It was negligently but gracefully gathered in folds, its only ornament a single dark-red rose. I have not yet spoken of her eyes. It is by the eyes we read the soul. Ruth's were liquid, dreamy, brown in colour, and full of a nervous light, that flashed and quivered as their owner was moved by joy or fear. They were the true poet's eyes; sympathetic, tender, mournful.

Such was Ruth; the representative of a class of women who seem out of place in this cold world of scepticism and cynicism. And yet they are the women who make heroes of men, by setting the example of patience, by boldly meeting the troubles of life, by defiantly scorning all that is false bravely loving all that is true, and dying fearlessly when their time comes. If I have dwelt upon the physical characteristics of Ruth, it is in order that subsequent events may be better understood.

It had been my lot to gain some little fame as a public reader. My host was aware of this, and politely requested me to entertain the company by the recital of one or other of my favourite pieces. The request was generally endorsed, and so I readily assented.

The audience ranged themselves round the room, Ruth settling herself on an ottoman at the feet of a companion. A music-stand was utilised for a reading-desk, and I took up my position at the end of the room, facing my audience. In the centre of the group were Ruth and her companion, who were immediately opposite me.

I had asked for a volume of Byron's poems, intending to read 'The Dream,' but by a mischance somebody had handed me a volume of Longfellow instead. I did not notice this

until I opened the book and my eye rested on 'Evangeline.' It was a favourite poem of mine. I had made a study of it. To my mind there was something verging on the sublime in that wonderful devotion of the woman as she wandered over the earth in search of her lost love. It is true that in the beautiful story human nature is depicted in the highest moral aspect; but does the man live who dares to deny that such devotion is altogether chimerical?

Much as I loved this poem, I did not care about reading it publicly. It wrought so much upon my own feelings that I invariably found my voice faltering and my eyes growing misty. This may be a great confession of weakness; but better to own to the existence of a green spot in one's nature than boast an utter indifference to the softening influences of the poetically-expressed ideas of other men. True poetry is the soul's language, and as such should thrill the soul.

I mentioned the mistake about the book, and said that I had a personal reason for not wishing to read 'Evangeline.' But my objection was at once overruled, and so, without further preliminary, I commenced:

> This is the forest primæval.

I know not how it was, but as I struck the key-note an indefinable sense of sorrow stole over me, and as my eyes wandered to Ruth's I involuntarily likened her to Longfellow's ideal woman.

As I proceeded I knew that I grew eloquent, as who would not with such a theme so loftily expressed! I fancied that a kind of mist filled the room that hid all else from me but the figure of Ruth. It seemed to me, indeed, that I was gazing upon the living, breathing Evangeline as she

> Sat by some nameless grave, and thought that perhaps in its bosom
> He was already at rest. And she longed to slumber beside him.

I became strangely affected. I read with passionate eloquence. The wonderful feeling that stirred me affected my

listeners, and I *heard* the sobbing of women, but *saw* naught save Ruth:

> A breath from the region of spirits
> Seemed to float in the air of night.

As the last line of the beautiful poem fell from my lips the spell was broken. I was exhausted and nervous. I closed the book, and sank upon a couch that was near. Then all eyes were directed to Ruth, who slowly rose from her seat. Her face was of the hue of marble; her eyes were fixed on me; she crossed the room and came to where I sat. I saw at once that she was in a magnetic sleep, and I motioned to the wondering onlookers not to disturb her. 'Would you like to see my hair?' she said, in a strange, dreamlike voice as she sat down beside me. 'It's beautiful hair; see how thick and luxuriant it is.'

As she spoke she slowly drew out the pins that confined her tresses, and shook the beautiful, brown, wavy hair in a rippling mass over her shoulders, passing her white fingers through the heavy folds and repeating the words: 'Is it not beautiful?' In a few minutes she was silent, the fingers ceased their movements, her head fell back, her lips quivered, and she burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing.

They carried her up to bed, and, as I felt ill and nervous, I excused myself and went home.

All night long I was strangely restless. I was at a loss to account for the influence I had exerted over the girl. Something mysterious had happened—I knew that, for do we not live in an atmosphere of mystery? Did not the great Plato say that the trembling power of the magnet was a spirit power? Pythagoras believed that the human soul could predict the future and unveil the mysteries. Heraclitus taught the doctrine that all living things had a soul and an evil spirit; while the learned Thales was convinced that in all men was a spirit that had the power of revealing secrets of the unknown world to mortal eyes, but that this power could be seldom exercised, owing to man's obdurate nature. On the following day I

called to make inquiries about Ruth. I was informed that she had been taken home in a very prostrate condition.

Some weeks passed, and she had apparently quite recovered. One evening I was returning to my home. It was winter time, and the night was very dark. I had to traverse a long country road that was lampless and lonely. I had not proceeded far before I became conscious that somebody or something was following me. If I went on, *it* followed. If I stopped, *it* stopped. I got uneasy; not that I feared anything mortal; but this unknown something made me nervous. I determined at length to solve the mystery, if mystery it was. I turned back, and, after walking about a dozen yards, I stood face to face with a figure—a female figure. It was Ruth.

'Why, Ruth, what are you doing here?' I exclaimed in wonderment.

'Seeking you,' she answered in low tones.

I realised immediately that she was in a magnetic trance. I knew that to awaken her suddenly would be to jeopardise her life. I was troubled, and scarcely knew how to act. She was thinly clad; the air was filled with snow, and a piercing wind was blowing. I drew her arm through mine, and turned back again towards the town.

Her hands were icy cold, and she shivered as if suffering from ague.

'You are not well,' I whispered, as I led her gently along.

'Quite well,' she answered, 'and *happy* with you.'

'You must return to your home,' I said.

'Yes, if you desire it.'

'I do desire it.'

'Then your wish is law.'

'Why?'

'*Because I love you.*'

There was no alteration in her tone as she said this. She was still asleep. In a little while I was enabled to procure a cab. She got inside at my bidding, and without any assistance from me. She was perfectly passive and subdued to my

will. As the vehicle neared her home I awoke her. She was greatly confused at first, and wept bitterly. I managed, however, to soothe her, when she confessed that she had followed me to my place of business, drawn by some strange power that was irresistible. She had watched me leave my office, and then her mind had got confused.

Before I left her she had become quite calm, and was apparently well. But with her recovery I had become depressed, and before I reached my house I was suffering from intense cerebral excitement, which confined me to the house for several days. When I recovered I felt it to be no more than my duty to acquaint Ruth's friends with the case, and request them to exercise some restraint over her movements.

This was done, and for weeks I heard nothing more of her, and began to think my influence had ceased. But my hopes were quickly blighted by a sudden message from her brother, requesting me to hasten to his sister, who was dangerously ill, and insisted on seeing me.

On arrival, I learned that she had been suffering from extraordinary excitement for days, and had called loudly for me. They had restrained her from going out, and she had gradually grown worse; and when I arrived she was utterly prostrated. I had been sent for by the advice of her physician. I met him at the house. He told me that I, and I alone, could save her life.

'How?' I asked in astonishment.

'By making her your wife!'

As there was no obstacle in the way of such an alliance taking place I determined to give the matter serious consideration, and, at the proper time, discuss the question with Ruth herself.

She grew much calmer during my stay, and was able to converse rationally. She ingenuously told me that in my presence she felt supremely happy. I stayed with her for some hours; but I did not think it was a fitting opportunity to speak of such a thing as marriage.

When I reached home that night I examined my feelings for Ruth, and was astonished to find how, unconsciously, as it were, she had grown precious to me. I decided, however, to let matters remain as they were for a week, and at the end of that time seek an interview, and ask her to engage herself to me with a view to marriage.

But that delay was fatal. Three days afterwards I was very restless. An indescribable nervousness seized me, and towards evening I grew very ill. For hours I tossed upon the bed in a state of feverish restlessness, but at length slept. I did not sleep long. I awoke suddenly, for a hand was laid upon my head. I looked up. At the bedside was Ruth, not in the flesh, but the spirit. On her face was an expression of ineffable sorrow.

'I have just died,' she murmured—'died for your sake.' Then with a deep sigh she faded away. I sprang out of bed and procured a light, and noted by the clock on the mantelpiece that it was exactly four o'clock. Suddenly I seemed to be raised from my feet, and carried by some strange agency through space. I sped on with terrible velocity, past fragments of shattered worlds; now in the light of gleaming stars, anon through darkness that was awful. Presently strange forms were moving around me. They were dark, shapeless masses; but in a little while they seemed to be surrounded with nebulous light that revealed them as human figures. I was in the world of spirits and she (Ruth) was with me.

Dream-like and indistinct and strange were all things.

'Even death cannot separate us,' she said, as she placed her hand in mine, and led me to the bank of a river. 'This is the River of Death,' she murmured.

Again I was caught up by the same mysterious agency, and carried with lightning velocity through space, and as I went I thought that all the hair was blown from my head. I reached the earth again, and fell into a sound and refreshing sleep. When I awoke the sun was shining, though with a subdued light, into my room. I noticed with some surprise

that a blue blind hung at my window. It was not so when I went to sleep. Flowers in vases stood upon the table. They were not there before. Where had they come from? Had she brought them? were questions I asked myself. Then I became aware that my head was enveloped in some covering. I put my hand up, and found that I was wearing a cap—an oilskin cap. I removed it. My head was bare; not a vestige of hair remained. Before I could recover from my surprise a woman entered—a strange woman. She crossed the room to replenish the flower-vases with water. I felt that I was the victim of a cruel hoax. I attempted to spring from the bed, but was as helpless as a child.

'What is the meaning of this outrage?' I cried.

The woman turned quickly round.

'Oh, sir, I am so glad you are better,' she said.

'Better!' I repeated.

'Yes, sir. You have been very ill, but, thank God! the crisis has passed. You will soon recover now, and be able to go away for change of air.'

'How long have I been here?' I asked sadly, as the truth commenced to dawn upon me.

'More than a month now, sir.'

What was the mystery, then? Had I really been to the spirit-world? Had Ruth really come to me? Yes, I *knew* she had.

I gradually grew stronger. I was enabled to go out. I learned then that on the date and at the hour I had noted poor Ruth had died. The night I left her she was considerably better; but a day or two afterwards grew worse, said that I was cruel in forsaking her, and in a paroxysm of cerebral excitement, and with my name on her lips, she had passed away.

In accordance with an oft and earnestly expressed wish of hers, her friends buried her in this sweet little churchyard, she having been born in the adjoining village.

I felt that in some way I was morally guilty of her death.

Had I confessed my love for her on the last night I had seen her, her life might have been spared. But, as she said it should be, death has not parted us. In a spirit-form she is ever with me.

I felt that I could not bear to be far from her resting-place, and so I came here, and as I sit in the quiet of the summer twilight, I hold sweet communion with her spirit; and we talk of things I dare not repeat, lest men should scoff.

Sometimes, when I wend my way, stool in hand, down the dell, I meet the villagers returning from their labours. They shake their heads and whisper one with another, and, when they think I cannot hear, say:

'Ah, poor fellow! he will never be better.'

I know not what they mean; but this I do *know*, the story I have told you is true.

XIII

A GHOST FROM THE SEA

TOWARDS the latter half of the fifties, Melbourne, in Australia, was startled by an extraordinary and terrible crime. It was at the very height of what was known as the 'gold fever.' A year or two before, news had spread like wildfire that gold had been discovered in enormous quantities in various parts of the country. That news literally seemed to turn people mad, and young and old, the halt, the lame, and even the blind, rushed away for the fabled regions of El Dorado. Whole families, who had been content to jog on quietly year after year, earning fair wages, and getting all the necessaries of life, were seized with the fever, and, selling up their belongings rump and stump, invested in billies,[1] tomahawks, spades, pickaxes, washing-pans,[2] and other etceteras, and shouldering their swags set off for the mysterious regions, where it was rumoured gold was lying on the surface of the ground in big nuggets. Fortunate, indeed, were those who had any belongings to sell in order to provide themselves with the plant required for roughing it in the bush; for many had nothing at all, save what they stood upright in, but, imagining that they were going to gather in the precious metal in sackfulls, they started off with the rest, only to perish, it may be, miserably of starvation, disappointment, and broken hearts. This

[1] Billies.—Tin cans for cooking.
[2] Washing-pans.—The primitive mode of washing gold.

period in the history of our Australian colonies is a startling record of human credulity, human folly, wickedness, despair and death. The fever was confined to no particular class of people. Clergymen, bankers, landowners, shipowners, merchants, shopkeepers, sailors, labourers, classical scholars and ignoramuses alike fell under the fascination. The worst passions of our nature manifested themselves ; hatred, envy, jealousy, greed, uncharitableness. The parsons were no better than the paupers ; the classical scholars than the ignoramuses. The thin veneering of so-called civilisation was rubbed off, and the savage appeared in all his fierceness at the cry of ' Gold ! gold ! '

It is at such periods as these that the moralist finds his pabulum, and those good but weak-minded people who think that human nature has improved with the advance of time have only to get on the house-tops and utter the cry of ' Gold ! ' again, to prove that we are not a whit better than our ancestors were three thousand years ago. This may not be very flattering to us, but alas! it is true. In those days of Australian gold rushes the bush was a veritable *terra incognita*. Explorers had attempted to penetrate into the mystic interior, but many never came back again, and to this day it is not known where their bones moulder. Those who did return were gaunt, famine-stricken, hollow-eyed, for they had looked upon death, and the stories they told were calculated to appal everyone but the most daring and reckless. But the report of the gold finds so turned the heads of people that, forgetting all about the dangers and privations they would have to endure, they started off into those unknown regions, and thousands literally perished by the way. The experiences of some of these unfortunate people are in themselves amongst the most pathetic and moving of human stories.[1]

[1] The following—the accuracy of which I vouch for—may serve to illustrate this. In 1863 I was wandering about in the Australian bush, and had travelled north-west from Sydney toward the Darling River. I had crossed the great Macquarie Swamp and had gained the hilly district known as the Dunlop Range. Here, in a wild and lonely spot,

Melbourne at the time of this narrative was not the Me bourne of to-day. It was then simply a collection of canva and wooden huts and houses, with a few buildings of a mor substantial character. One of the most imposing houses i the place was that known as 'Jackson's Boarding-house It was built partly of wood and partly of stone, and was kep by a man and his wife named Jackson. Very little, if any thing, was known of the Jacksons' history, beyond that the had come to the colony a few years previously. Jackson wa a nautical man, and had purchased a schooner with which h traded up and down the coast, though with indifferent succes:

I came across a mound overgrown with coarse, rank weeds and fern At the head of the mound was a wooden slab, then rotten and weathe stained. On this slab an inscription had been rudely carved, and wit some difficulty I made out the following: '*Sacred to the memory of Hele and William Maitland and their baby, all of whom died and wer buried here in* 1855.' In that brief record I felt that a romantic life' history was embodied, and, naturally, I wondered who this family c Maitlands were that they had all died at or near the same time, an been laid to rest in this wild and remote district. Subsequently, o returning towards Sydney, and while staying at Bathurst, I made in quiries about that lonely grave and was told the following brief story b an old squatter: 'When the gold fever broke out a young man an woman, with a child about twelve months old, had come up fror Sydney. The woman was about eighteen or nineteen years of age, an was a frail, delicate thing. The man was very little older, and seeme to be suffering from ill-health. They were very reticent about them selves, and gave out that their name was Maitland, and that they ha been married a year aud a half. The man obtained a situation as shepherd, which he retained for something like three months. The he suddenly threw it up and started off into the bush. He returned i the course of a few weeks, and, having purchased some provisions an necessaries for the bush, he took his wife and child and went off again Nothing more was heard of them for some months, when a stock-drive in search of stray cattle came across their skeletons at the foot of th Dunlop Range. They were identified by some papers on their persons and other things. Some men went out from Bathurst and dug a grav in which the remains were buried.' The supposition was that the youn man had been prospecting for gold. There was evidence, in fact, tha he had excavated to a considerable depth, but, being in bad health, h had gradually succumbed; and the young wife, unable or unwilling t make her way back, had with her child starved to death by her deac husband. Such touching stories as this about the Australian bus could be multiplied almost *ad infinitum*.

At last his schooner was wrecked, and Jackson and his wife, who had always sailed with him, built a wooden shanty, in what was then known as Canvas Town—now Melbourne—where they sold liquors and provisions. They seemed to have done fairly well, for very soon they erected what was then quite an imposing building, and they called it 'Jackson's Boarding-house.'

Jackson was remarkable for an extraordinarily powerful physique. He stood about six feet high, and his muscular development was so great that it was said he could lift a cask of split peas, weighing nearly three hundredweight, from the ground, and raise it at arm's length above his head. He was an ill-favoured man, however, for he had a low brow, small, cunning sort of eyes, and was exceedingly passionate in his temper. But it was notable that he seemed to be strongly attached to his wife, and they were never known to disagree.

Mrs. Jackson was a striking contrast to her husband, for she was a slightly built little woman, with a pink and white face, sickly blue eyes, and a mass of tow-like hair that was almost the colour of flax, whereas her husband was as dark as a raven.

Soon after these people had opened their boarding-house, there came to lodge with them a Mr. and Mrs. Harvey, who had recently arrived from England. They had, like many others, come out to try and improve their fortunes. A warm intimacy seemed to spring up between the two couples, and they lived apparently in the greatest harmony. It was understood that Mr. Harvey was a mechanic by trade. He was a strong, healthy man, very handy and useful, and did odd jobs for the community. His wife was a pretty, agreeable woman, and soon became a great favourite, for she played the piano and sang well, and was always ready to afford amusement or render assistance to anyone needing it, where it lay in her power. Her husband acquired the character of a rather indolent, good-natured sort of fellow, whose aim seemed to be to suddenly accumulate wealth without doing much labour for it.

At length the gold fever set in, and amongst those who started off in the first rush for the regions of fabulous wealth was Harvey, his wife remaining behind at Jackson's boarding-house. Some eight months later Harvey returned, and soon the report spread that he had brought thousands of pounds' worth of nuggets and gold dust. He remained in the town for four weeks, during which he and his wife denied themselves nothing, and it was evident that the report about his wealth was in the main true. Then, having furnished himself with an extensive outfit in the shape of tent, cooking-stove, digging and washing utensils, he started up the country again, Mrs. Harvey still remaining at the boarding-house. She purchased a horse and buggy, provided herself with fine clothes and jewellery, and common gossip had it that this little, blue-eyed, flaxen-haired woman was the richest person in Melbourne. Two months later, her husband still being absent at the diggings, the community was startled one morning by a report that Mrs. Harvey had been murdered. The report proved to be only too true, and the story told by a female servant in the boarding-house was this. She went to the lady's room to see why she had not appeared, it being an hour and a half after her usual time of rising. She found the door locked, and, repeated knocking having failed to elicit a response, she informed her master, and expressed fears that something was wrong. Jackson at once went upstairs with some of the lodgers, and, failing to get any answer, he at once broke open the door, and then a terrible sight revealed itself.

Lying across the bed was the body of Mrs. Harvey. She was dressed only in her night-dress, which was disarranged and torn as if she had struggled desperately, as in fact she had, for further evidence of this was forthcoming. She was on her back, her head hanging over the farthest side of the bed. Twisted tightly round her neck until it had cut into the flesh was a crimson cord sash or belt, such as in those days was common—these sashes, or, more correctly speaking,

scarves, being worn by men round their waists to keep their trousers up, instead of braces. The horribly distorted features showed that the poor woman had been strangled, and subsequent medical examination brought to light that her head had been forced back with such tremendous force that the neck was absolutely broken. Discolorations about the mouth indicated that a heavy hand had been pressed there to keep her from screaming. There were also deep indents and bruises on the wrists, which proved that she had struggled and been firmly grasped there by the murderer. Other parts of the body were also terribly bruised, as if in the struggle she had been banged repeatedly against the massive wooden bedstead.

Murder had been done, that was certain. That the murderer was a man was equally certain, for no female could have exerted such tremendous force as had evidently been used. It was no less certain that robbery had been the motive, for a very large travelling trunk or box had been forced open, in spite of an unusually strong lock, and two iron bands round it which were secured with padlocks. All the poor creature's clothes had been turned out of the box, and were scattered about the floor, as well as her jewellery, nothing in that way being taken. Now what did that prove? It proved this: the murderer, with the cunning of a devil, knew that in such a place to possess himself of her jewellery, valuable as it was, would almost certainly lead to his detection. No, it was neither her jewellery nor her clothes he wanted, but the nuggets and gold dust her husband had brought from the diggings. No one could swear to gold dust or nuggets, and both were plentiful, for diggers, especially sailors, were constantly arriving from the diggings with hoards of gold, which they sold for ready cash far below their value; for at this early period there was no regular exchange or agency for the purchase of the precious metal.

The next question was: How did the murderer get into the room? Not by the door, for a dozen witnesses vowed that it was locked on the inside, the key still in the lock, when Jackson broke open the door. The only other entrance, then,

was by the window, twenty-five feet from the ground. There was no indication that a ladder had been used, and so the theory was that the murderer had secreted himself under the bed, and when his fiendish work was completed he had gone out by the window, climbed up by means of an iron gutter pipe to the roof, and had then descended into the house through a skylight.

Now came the most important question of all: Who was the murderer? At the time of the crime there were nearly forty people staying in the boarding-house, mostly men, a good many of them being sailors. The police arrangements of the town were very primitive, and by no means equal to coping with such a mysterious tragedy, and unfortunately not an atom of evidence could be got that would have justified the arrest of any individual. The result was the mystery was destined to remain a mystery for ever; and the times were too exciting and too changing for such a crime even as that to long occupy the public mind, and so, almost with the burying of the flaxen-haired woman who had been so cruelly done to death, the tragedy was forgotten for a time. Three months later, however, its memory was revived by the arrival of Mr. Harvey. He had written two or three times to his wife, had received no answer, had got alarmed, and had come to see what was the matter. The news almost drove him off his mind, for he had been passionately attached to his wife. He stated that he had left her with about ten thousand pounds' worth of gold; and he now offered to give anyone five thousand pounds' worth of gold who would bring the murderer to justice. The offer, however, proved of no avail; not the faintest clue could be obtained. Jackson had taken charge of the murdered woman's effects, and these he handed to the husband, who certified his belief that they were all correct except the gold, which was in nuggets and dust, one nugget alone being valued at between two and three thousand pounds. And so the poor husband departed, an utterly changed and broken man.

Another person in the community had also changed considerably. This was Jackson, the boarding-house keeper. He generally bore the character of being a steady, industrious man, but he suddenly developed a craving for drink, and as a consequence neglected his business, which, of course, declined, the result being an opposition house was started, and Jackson's once flourishing boarding establishment lost all its custom. Jackson drank harder than ever then, and even his wife gave way to the vice. At length, a year after the murder, Jackson sold off his effects, and he and his wife took their passage for England, in a ship called the Gloriana.

This ends the first part of the record, but the sequel—startling and inexplicable—has yet to be told.

The Gloriana was a large, full-rigged, clipper ship, one of a line trading between the mother country and the colonies. She was commanded by a hard-headed Scotchman, Captain Norman Douglas, who was well known in the trade, and, in fact, was one of the most popular skippers on that route. He bore the reputation of being a singularly conscientious and truthful man, and utterly without sentiment or superstition. There are no doubt plenty of people still living who were acquainted with him, who would unhesitatingly endorse this statement.

The Gloriana had a fair complement of passengers, first and second class. Amongst the first class were Jackson and his wife. It is necessary, in order to make what follows more clearly intelligible, to describe one portion of the ship. She was fitted with what was known in the old days as a 'monkey poop,' with an alloway or passage running on each side. This passage was reached from the main deck by three or four wooden steps. Right aft a short flight of steps led to the poop, on which was a hurricane house, with a companion way going down to the cuddy, or, as it is now called, the saloon. In the break of the poop, flush with the main deck, so that his window and door faced the bows of the vessel, was the captain's state-room, and alongside of his door was the entrance to the

cuddy from the main deck. The Jacksons' cabin was the first in the cuddy on the left-hand side on entering, and next to the captain's, though it must be remembered that the captain had to come out of the cuddy to get into his room. That is, his door opened from the main deck, whereas the Jacksons' opened from the cuddy, and consequently at right angles with the captain's.

The vessel made a splendid passage through Bass's Straits, the weather being magnificent, but it was noted with some astonishment that the Jacksons rarely appeared on deck, but remained in their cabin, and it was whispered about that Mr. Jackson was almost constantly muddled more or less with drink. He and his wife kept to themselves, and seemed to carefully avoid their fellow passengers. One night, when the ship was well out in the South Pacific, and bowling along under double-reefed top-sails, Captain Douglas was sleeping soundly in the middle watch, when his door was suddenly opened, and Jackson precipitated himself into his room, dressed only in his night shirt. He was ghastly pale, was trembling like an aspen leaf, and seemed to be suffering from the effects of a terrible fright.

Naturally thinking that something was the matter, the captain sprang from his bed, and was surprised to find Jackson on his knees, his lips blanched, his face streaming with a cold perspiration.

'What is the meaning of this?' the captain demanded.

'For God's sake save me!' Jackson moaned in terror.

'Save you from what and whom?' asked the captain, thinking that his passenger was suffering from delirium tremens.

'From her,' groaned the man. 'She all but lured me into the sea, but I broke the spell in time, and rushed in here.'

This extraordinary remark naturally tended to confirm the captain's idea about the delirium, and so he soothed his passenger as well as he could, and then led him back to his

cabin, where he noted that Mrs. Jackson was soundly asleep in her bunk. He helped Jackson into his bunk, tucked him well up with the clothes, and left him; and as he came out of the cuddy on to the deck to reach his own room again, he started back until he all but fell, for it seemed to him that a flash of brilliant light had almost blinded him, while something soft touched his face. He thought that this might be a sea-bird, but what was the light?

It was the second mate's watch, and that officer was walking the poop, while the portion of the crew on duty were lying or sitting about in the waist of the vessel.

'Mr. Harrington,' sang out the captain to the second mate, 'what was that light?'

'What light, sir?' asked the officer in astonishment.

'Why, didn't you see a brilliant flash of light?'

'No, sir,' answered the officer, thinking the captain must have been indulging in a little too much grog.

'Ahoy, there, you fellows,' roared the skipper to the watch on deck, 'where did that light come from?'

'What light, sir?' asked several voices.

'Good heavens! did you not see a flash of bright light?' exclaimed the captain angrily, for he thought he was being made a fool of.

'No, sir, we saw no light,' answered the crew unanimously.

Captain Douglas was mystified. What did this mean? Was it a delusion? Had he been made a fool of by his senses, or what?

He went into his cabin again with his mind strangely disturbed. The ship was sailing splendidly, a heavy sea running after her, a gale was blowing, the sky was clear, the stars shining brightly, and neither in sea nor sky was there anything to account for that flash of light, or that *something* that had touched him. His officer and his men could not have been in collusion, and therefore Captain Douglas came to the conclusion that he had been made a fool of by his own senses, though,

taken in connection with Jackson's strange remarks, Captain Douglas was affected as he had never been affected before.

Next day the crew told one another that 'the old man' had been 'soaking himself.'

Captain Douglas was unusually thoughtful. He invited Jackson into his cabin and asked him what had been the matter with him during the night. Jackson appeared to be very ill, with a scared, cowed expression in his face.

'I don't know,' he replied a little sullenly, 'I think I must have been dreaming.'

'Well, I hope you won't dream again like that,' remarked the captain, and then he told his own experience. As he heard this Jackson seemed to grow terrified again, and he groaned between chattering teeth :

'Heaven pity me then, it's a reality!'

'What is?' asked the astonished captain.

Jackson covered his face with his hands as he answered :

'Three times since we left Melbourne I have seen the vision of a woman, and she tries to lure me into the sea.' He shuddered like one who was seized with palsy.

A few hours before this Captain Douglas would have roared with incredulous laughter had he been told such a thing. Now he was solemnly silent, for his own experience—the touch and the flash of light—permitted of no explanation that he could furnish. And so this tough old sailor, who had sailed the salt seas from his youth, and braved the perils of the deep in all parts of the world, was seized with a nameless fear that he could not allay.

The good ship continued to bowl along before favouring gales until she drew into the stormy ocean that roars around Cape Horn. During this time Jackson was seldom seen except for an hour or two in the early part of the day, when he and his wife would promenade the poop. He seemed to have changed very much. Everyone on board said that he looked ten years older since leaving Melbourne. His hair had blanched, his face was pallid and wrinkled, his eyes were restless as if from fear.

The vessel fell in with terrific weather off the Horn. Monstrous icebergs and field ice made navigation perilous, while the hurricane's wrath lashed the ice-strewn ocean into mountainous waves. The ship could only pursue her course under storm sails, and only then by ceaseless vigilance being exercised on the part of all the crew. For nearly a week the captain was on deck, snatching an hour or two's sleep as best he could during the twenty-four.

One night, when the Gloriana had nearly doubled the Horn, the weather seemed to grow worse, so that it became necessary to heave the ship to under a close-reefed main topsail. The sky was inky in its blackness. Not a star shone out from the ebony vault; but over the sea were vast flashing fields of phosphorescent foam as the giant waves broke with an awful roar; while looming in the blackness were ponderous icebergs in whose hollows the sea thundered. Now and again unusually terrific squalls came howling up from the south, bringing showers of jagged ice and hailstones as big as marbles. It was a night of horror and danger such as those who have never sailed in that stormy southern ocean can form but a faint conception of.

Vigilant and anxious, and clad in heavy sea-boots and oil-skins, Captain Douglas stood on the poop with the chief mate; the second mate and several of the crew being on the forecastle straining their eyes on the look-out for the ice, while both in the main and foretop a man was lashed also on the look-out. Suddenly as the captain and chief officer stood together at the break of the poop sheltering themselves under the lee of a tarpaulin lashed in the rigging, the captain staggered, and seizing the officer's arm exclaimed hoarsely:

'My God! what is that?'

And well might he so exclaim, for to his horrified gaze there appeared on the main deck a mass of trembling light that in an instant seemed to change into a woman's figure, a woman with long, streaming fair hair, while round her white neck a scarf was twisted. The captain and his mate were

transfixed with horror, for they both saw it. But they were to see even a more fearsome sight yet. The apparition rose, waving her arms the while, and floating out over the howling waste of black, writhing waters; and as she rose there suddenly darted from the cabin doorway the half-naked Jackson, his hair streaming in the wind. The apparition still waved her arm, still floated out away from the ship, and then, before the terror-stricken men who witnessed the awful sight could move to stop him, the wretched man uttered a scream of despair and fear that froze the blood of those who heard it, and with one bound he leapt into the boiling waters, and at that instant the apparition disappeared like a flash of lightning.

It was some moments before either of the two men had sufficiently recovered to speak. Then they asked each other if their senses had fooled them. But the captain, remembering his former experience, rushed to Jackson's cabin. Mrs. Jackson alone was in it, and she was sleeping. It was no delusion then. Jackson had jumped overboard, lured by that ghost from the sea. It was impossible to make the slightest attempt to save him; he had gone down into the black and boiling waters never to rise again.

Mrs. Jackson was not informed of her husband's suicide until the following day, and when she heard of it she fell down in a swoon; and, on recovering, it was found that she had lost her reason, so that it was necessary to watch and guard her for the rest of the voyage. On arrival in England it was deemed prudent to place her in an asylum, where she died six months later. No word ever escaped her lips that would have tended to elucidate the awful mystery. She seemed to be tortured with some indescribable anguish, and from morning till night she paced to and fro, wringing her hands and moaning piteously. But to those who witnessed that appalling scene off Cape Horn when Jackson went to his doom, the mystery required no explanation, for it explained itself: and that explanation was that it was he who had murdered poor Mrs. Harvey, and the phantom of his victim had lured him to a terrible death.

XIV

THE SHINING HAND

About the beginning of the present century, Mr. Laurence Greenwood, commercial traveller and debt collector, left London on a periodical visit to the North, his ground extending as far as Edinburgh and Glasgow and some of the towns of Fifeshire. Mr. Greenwood represented, and had done for over a quarter of a century, the celebrated firm of Lovell, Boyd and Lovell, who were general merchants and manufacturers. They had a trade which practically extended all over the British Islands, for their goods bore a reputation second to none. However, it is not with the firm we have to deal, but with their representative, Mr. Greenwood. This gentleman was accounted one of the most successful business men on the road, and was held in the very highest esteem by his employers. On his outward journeys he invariably had with him a number of very valuable samples mainly consisting of jewellery, and when returning he was generally the bearer of considerable sums of money, which he had collected, in addition to his samples. Knowing, of course, the risks to which he was exposed from attacks of footpads, highwaymen, and other desperadoes who infested the roads, he was always well armed; and, being an exceedingly powerful man, he was calculated to prove an ugly customer had anyone ventured to attack him; but, in addition, he was always accompanied by a servant. For some years his servant and travelling companion had been an Irishman named

Hugh Dewey, who was conspicuous no less than his master for gigantic physique and dauntless courage. Hugh's probity was supposed to be too powerful for any temptation. In fact, so high did he stand in the estimation of the firm and Mr. Greenwood that they would have trusted him with untold money. It used to be said of Hugh Dewey that he was 'honesty itself.'

However, on one occasion when master and man went to the North, Hugh Dewey mysteriously disappeared, and with him a case containing money and valuables to the extent of several thousand pounds, and, though every means possible were taken to trace him, they proved unavailing, and so the firm suffered the loss, and they expressed themselves in no measured terms against the Irishman. It was during the return journey from Scotland that Dewey disappeared. He and his master had posted from Edinburgh in exceedingly bad weather. They had, in fact, delayed their starting from Edinburgh, owing to the reports of flooded roads and bridges washed away, but as there seemed to be no immediate signs of a change the travellers determined to face all risks, Mr. Greenwood being very anxious to get home, as one of his daughters was going to be married, and he had promised to be back in time for the wedding. They proceeded without adventure, though not without difficulty, owing to the state of the roads, as far as the Border. They had come by way of Hawick, as Mr. Greenwood had business in that town, and leaving there in the morning they had driven by way of Castleton, where they stayed the night, hoping to reach Carlisle the next day. The day broke, however, with a deluge of rain, and so bad were the roads that rapid progress was impossible. In fact, in some parts the River Liddel, which is skirted by the road, had overflowed its banks, and greatly added to the danger that beset the travellers.

At that time the road between Castleton and Carlisle was exceedingly wild, and was difficult to traverse even in good weather, for it was badly kept, the traffic being small. But in

such weather as then prevailed, none but hardy travellers with pressing business would have ventured to use it.

'There is one thing,' remarked Mr. Greenwood to his companion, 'we are not likely to be troubled with any gentlemen of the road.'

'Indade, no sir,' exclaimed Hugh; 'but even if they were to pay us any attention, I'd foight till the last ounce of me blood, knowing what's in the box. By me faith, but if one of the rascals got hold of that he might retire from business, and live comfortably for the rest of his days. If I had as much as is in there I'd go home to me native place and marry swate Katherine O'Flannigan. Arrah! how me mouth whathers when I think of her wid her pertaty patch, and the pigs and the small farum!'

'Why, if she has a farm,' exclaimed Mr. Greenwood, 'you should lose no time in marrying her. You and she would do well with a small farm between you.'

'Faix, sir, she wouldn't have me unless I'd some money of me own. You see, she's a widdy, and she's the most beautiful creature that ever the sun shone on; while, as for offers of marriage, she gets two an' three every blessed day of her loife. But she's thrue to me, and, says she, Hugh, she says, when you've a small fortun' to put to moine we'll get married, but not before. Be the powers, though, I don't see how I'm to get the fortun' except by a windfall.'

When the subsequent events happened that I shall relate, Mr. Greenwood remembered this conversation, and it caused him to entertain suspicion against Hugh that otherwise he would not have done.

In spite of every effort they made to reach Carlisle that day, they found themselves towards the evening in the exceedingly lonely neighbourhood of the Solway Moss. A few miles ahead was the little place called Longtown, where they might have got good accommodation for the night, but not only was their horse knocked up with the unusual exertion it had gone through with the heavy roads, but to proceed in the dark

would have been to court disaster. They therefore resolved to stay at a hostelry called the Bell, which stood back from the road a little, and at the very head of the Moss. The house did not bear the best of reputations, though the worst that had been urged against it was that it was the resort of smugglers, who used to run cargoes of French brandy, tobacco, and laces, up the Solway Firth. This might or might not have been true, though the probabilities were in favour of its being true.

The situation of the house was lonely in the extreme. There was no other habitation near for a considerable distance, and the Bell was exposed to every air from heaven, while the terrific gales that blew up the Firth beat so furiously on it, that had the foundation not been good it must have been blown down.

The Bell was in the occupation of a man by the name of Chisholm. The family consisted of the father and mother, who were well advanced in years, and three sons, the youngest twenty-three, the oldest about thirty. They were stalwart fellows, and by no means prepossessing, for they were very dark complexioned and much weather-beaten, owing to their calling of fishermen, and no doubt they led very hard lives. Mr. Greenwood had once before stayed in the house, and the old people had made him as comfortable as they could. On that occasion the three sons were away with their boat in the Firth, so that Mr. Greenwood did not see them. On arriving now, however, the three young men were at home, and at once busied themselves in unharnessing the horse, while the youngest of the three lifted the case of treasures out of the vehicle, though Mr. Greenwood met him at the door and relieved him of his burden, the young man remarking:

'That box is pretty heavy, sir. There is something valuable in there, I warrant.'

To this Mr. Greenwood vouchsafed no reply, but handed the box to his servant Hugh, who at once carried it upstairs to his room. The old couple lost no time in preparing a hot supper for the weary travellers, while the horse was well

rubbed down by the young men, fed with a bran mash, and warmly stabled for the night. Mr. Greenwood having assured himself of this, for he was very considerate of his beast, ordered a large bowl of hot spiced ale with eggs in it, and invited all the family to partake of some with him.

He retired upstairs to his room about ten o'clock. Hugh Dewey's room adjoined his, and he found that the precious box had been taken into his servant's room.

'You had better bring the box to me, Hugh,' he said, as he prepared to divest himself of his boots.

'Shure, sir, it's as safe with me as it is with you,' answered Hugh.

Mr. Greenwood, who was very tired, and a little drowsy through the hot ale he had consumed, offered no objection to his servant retaining the box in his room, and having looked to the priming of his pistols and placed them under his pillow, he undressed, blew out the light, tumbled into bed, and was soon sound asleep in spite of the gale that was storming round the house, and the heavy rain that lashed the windows as if intent on shivering the glass to atoms.

Mr. Greenwood did not wake very early. He had slept the sleep of the just, and awoke much refreshed and strengthened. The gale had abated, but the morning was sullen and gloomy, and a thick mist wreath was lying over the Moss, and stretching out to the Firth. Mr. Greenwood noted these things, as jumping out of bed he drew aside the curtains of the little window, and looking at his massive gold repeater watch saw, to his surprise, that it was ten o'clock.

'By Jove, I'm late,' he mused, 'and must get beyond Carlisle to-day.' Then he hammered on the wall with the boot-jack and sung out: 'Ay, Hugh, there! turn out, man; it's ten o'clock!'

Mr. Greenwood now became absorbed in his toilet, so that ten minutes elapsed before he remembered that Hugh had not responded, so he went to the servant's room, pushed open the door, and found that Hugh was not there.

'Umph! the fellow's up,' muttered Mr. Greenwood, as he returned to finish his toilet, 'but why the deuce didn't he call me?'

Ten minutes later Greenwood descended, and the first person he met was the old woman.

'Have you seen my servant?' he asked.

'No, sir. I didn't even know that he was about.'

'Dear me, that's strange. I suppose he is outside somewhere. Well, just tell your sons, will you, to put the horse into the chaise at once. I must be off as soon as I've swallowed a mouthful of breakfast.'

'Well, the lads are away to the fishing, but my old man will do it.'

At that moment the 'old man' entered the house, bringing in some wood for the fire.

'Have you seen that servant of mine, Mr. Chisholm?' asked Greenwood.

''Deed, no, master; I thought he was still in his bed.'

This reply caused the first suspicious thought to flash across Mr. Greenwood's mind, and, turning hastily, he ran upstairs to Hugh's room to look for the precious box, but he looked in vain. It was gone. Mr. Greenwood became white and red by turns.

'My God!' he exclaimed, 'the vagabond has sneaked off with the valuables.'

Mr. Greenwood could not be blamed for this thought, for Hugh's disappearance, taken in connection with his remarks of the previous evening, was certainly a strong piece of circumstantial evidence. In great distress Mr. Greenwood ran downstairs and questioned the old people. They both expressed the greatest surprise and distress, and said that the lads had gone off about four o'clock when the wind went down, and, as far as the old people knew, the doors were safely barred and bolted at that hour.

Although Mr. Greenwood had his own thoughts about the sons he did not express any suspicions, but, without waiting

for his breakfast, he went off as fast as his horse would take him to Carlisle. He immediately lodged a complaint with the authorities in that city, and some of the city officers at once returned with him to make an investigation on the spot. The result of that investigation was to satisfy him that the three sons had really gone to the fishing at four o'clock in the morning, that Hugh was not with them, and that they had not aided him to get away. The conclusion arrived at, therefore, was this: Hugh had made his way to the shores of the Firth, and with some of the money he obtained from the box he had hired a cutter to take him over to Ireland. The officers promised to try and get confirmation of this supposition, and Mr. Greenwood pursued his journey to London with all possible speed, his faith in human nature very much shaken, for he had hitherto considered Hugh Dewey to be the prince of honest fellows. Mr. Greenwood's firm used every possible means to obtain tidings of Hugh, a Bow Street officer being sent over specially to Ireland to the man's native place. But it was soon placed beyond doubt that Dewey had not gone there, so that his disappearance was wrapped in a great deal of mystery.

Six months later we find Mr. Greenwood again journeying to the North in company with a new servant, upon whom, however, he kept a very watchful and jealous eye. He resolved to spend a night at the Bell on his way up, his idea being to severely question the Chisholms about Hugh's disappearance, for, in spite of the investigation that had been made, he could not banish from his mind a shadowy suspicion that they could if they liked help to clear up the mystery. In fact, it had grown upon him during the months that had passed that the sons, if not the old people, had been party to Hugh's flight, and it was Mr. Greenwood's intention, if he saw the slightest signs to justify his suspicions, to have the Chisholms arrested and subjected to legal cross-examination.

The weather was very different now to what it was when Mr. Greenwood had last been at the Bell. Summer was

smiling over the land, and the Moss was redolent of heather and wild flowers, while bees and butterflies flitted about in the glad sunshine. He arrived in the afternoon, and it struck him that the old people were by no means glad to see him. The sons were away with their boat, he was informed, but they were expected home in the course of the evening.

The sun went down in a burst of splendour, sending up from the distant Firth flashes of light that glowed on trees and shrubs with a dazzling radiance. Then the twilight succeeded, gradually deepening to purple and darkness, and in the cloudless heavens the stars shone with a galaxy of glory. At eleven o'clock the sons had not returned, and, as the old people expressed an opinion that they were now not likely to return that night, Mr. Greenwood, feeling very disappointed, retired to rest. He did not sleep at first, but lay thinking and wishing that he could solve the mystery of Hugh Dewey. He had been very fond of the fellow, and to be deceived in him like this cut him to the quick. As he thus lay pondering, the moon rose full and round, filling the room with subdued light. Mr. Greenwood sprang out of bed, looked at his watch, noting that it was half-past twelve. Then he drew aside the curtain and peered out. The night was glorious. The sky was a brilliant splendour of stars, and the pale silver of the moon threw a weird sheen over the landscape, away in the east the Firth glittering like a polished shield.

As Mr. Greenwood gazed on the witching scene he observed what he took to be a will o' the wisp flitting about in the Moss. It did not flit far, however, but hovered over a particular spot, and presently, to Mr. Greenwood's imagination, it assumed some outline resemblance to a human hand. He was not without superstition, and had a considerable belief in supernatural visitations, for railways and telegraphs had not yet chased ghosts and hobgoblins from their favourite haunts.

'I declare it's a corpse light,' muttered Mr. Greenwood with a slight shudder, and dropping the curtain he sprang

into bed, and perhaps he did pull the clothes up somewhat unusually high about his face. However, he soon fell asleep, but how long he slept he was never able to say. He woke up with a strange sense of chilliness, although the night was warm, almost sultry; and as he became fully conscious to his surroundings an uncanny creepiness thrilled him as he saw with amazement that the will o' the wisp, or corpse light, as he had called it, had come into the room, and was distinctly visible, notwithstanding the effulgence of the moon.

Mr. Greenwood was undoubtedly a brave man where things earthly were concerned, but he honestly confessed to a shrinking that was akin to fear in regard to the inexplicable. As he rubbed his eyes now to assure himself that he was really awake, he saw before his astonished gaze a distinct and perfect hand with part of the wrist. It was bright and shining, and seemed to glow with a metallic radiance. When he first saw it, it was perfectly still, floating seemingly over the foot of the bed. But presently it moved very slowly, and with a gliding, graceful motion, to the door, and without a sound it drew back the bolts, turned the key, threw open the door, and pointed its index finger into the abysmal blackness of the outer passage.

If Mr. Greenwood's hair did not altogether stand erect on his head, a cold perspiration did most certainly break out, and stream down his body, as he gazed like one hypnotised on this phantom hand. What did the phenomenon portend? At that moment Mr. Greenwood made no attempt to explain the mystery, but sat bolt upright, staring with fixed eyes on the shining hand, which was now motionless, with the finger still pointing to the passage.

Mr. Greenwood could never tell how long he remained staring in a state of awed fascination at that wonderful sight. But suddenly it seemed to him that he must at all hazards make an attempt to solve the mystery, and he sprang out of bed. Then the hand floated slowly into the passage, and, like one who was drawn on by some irresistible, magnetic

influence, he followed. At the end of the passage was a rough ladder or stairway, used to gain access to a garret by means of a trap door in the ceiling. The hand floated up these steps with the index finger pointing upward. Still under the influence, Mr. Greenwood mounted the ladder, pushed aside the trap, entered, and found himself in an extensive loft, with the roof sloping down on each side. The place was obviously a receptacle for a heterogeneous collection of lumber. There were old fishing nets, broken oars, cork floats, pieces of ropes, broken boxes, heaps of paper, and other things of a like sort. There was a skylight in each side of the roof, and these two skylights admitted a great deal of the moonlight, but there were corners necessarily which were shrouded in shadow. Into these corners the shining hand floated, and its radiating light rendered the various objects that came within its influence perfectly distinct. Presently it shone over something that made Mr. Greenwood stagger. That something was his own travelling box that had disappeared when Dewey went away. It was a box peculiar to commercial travellers, being almost square with a flush lid, the whole encased with leather, and secured with two brass bands, which were made to be fastened with small padlocks, in addition to the ordinary lock, which was unusually strong. The box was now split and broken. It had evidently been smashed open with a heavy hammer, or similar instrument. If Mr. Greenwood had really had any fear, it left him as he thus discovered a portion of his lost property, and the movement of the phantom hand had now an intelligent meaning for him. It had revealed to him his lost box, and that was a link. But what Mr. Greenwood thought was this. Hugh Dewey had leagued himself with the Chisholms, feeling, perhaps, that unless he shared the plunder with them he would not get away. The three keys, for there were three, one for each padlock and one for the centre lock, were, on the night of the robbery, in Mr. Greenwood's possession, and no amount of ordinary force would have opened the box, which

was made of stout oak. For one man to have carried it away would very severely have taxed his powers; and it was a consideration of this fact which had caused Mr. Greenwood to suspect that some of the Chisholms must have been party to the robbery. He had dwelt and dwelt upon that one idea until it had become a conviction with him that Dewey had had a confederate, and it was in the hope that he might be able to trace that confederate that he decided to revisit the Bell.

These thoughts passed rapidly through his mind, as he stood contemplating the wreck of his travelling case, which certainly would have escaped the eye of a casual observer, for it was thrown amongst a heap of rubbish of all kinds, including broken packing cases.

When the hand had thus made its revelation it floated down through the trap door and Greenwood followed. When he reached the passage there was the phantom hand stationary, with the index finger pointing towards the stairs that led to the lower storey. Mr. Greenwood was a little puzzled at first to understand what this meant, and he stood irresolute until it struck him that he was to go downstairs. But he was in his night clothes, so he returned to his room, and hastily slipped on his trousers, coat, and boots, then went out into the passage once more. Sure enough there was that marvellous sight still, the shining hand, spreading around it a light that made things faintly visible; and controlled, as was obvious, by some intelligent will. It was wonderful, thrilling, and startling; but Mr. Greenwood was too absorbed then to be startled. He felt that he was being made the instrument to bring criminals to justice, and clear up what had so long been a mystery.

Following the hand he descended the stairs, and he was conscious of treading with the greatest care, so as to make no noise, and thus avoid the risk of awakening anyone in the house. When the entrance door to the house was reached the luminous hand, much to Mr. Greenwood's

amazement, slipped the bars and bolts, and opened the door with absolute silence, and then floated out into the open, and of course Greenwood followed; but now he was bewildered, for he could not comprehend why he was being taken outside. The moonlight was most brilliant, so that the lustre of the hand was lessened; but still it was perfectly visible, and it moved towards the Moss. It is necessary to explain that this Moss was an extensive tract of quagmire and bog, overgrown with bog cotton, rushes, and heather. There were beaten tracts through it, worn by the country people and fishermen as they passed to and from the sea. Streams also flowed through, creating in parts very dangerous places into which a person unacquainted with them might plunge, in which case he would most certainly have been lost for ever. But Greenwood was not conscious of the slightest misgivings or fear. Though he knew nothing from actual experience of the Moss, he knew that it bore an evil reputation, and was exceedingly dangerous to strangers attempting to traverse its intricacies. But Greenwood was inspired with courage and confidence by the sight of that phantom hand, and whither it led he followed. And he followed it down one of the beaten tracks until it reached the spot, so far as he could judge, where from his window he had seen what he then supposed was a will o' the wisp. Now it hovered and flitted to and fro just like a will o' the wisp, though its radius was very limited. Mr. Greenwood would have been obtuse indeed if he had not speedily come to the conclusion that there was something buried there. But he could not dig, because he had no implements. So what he did was this, he took off a silk handkerchief he had round his neck, and with his knife he pegged it on that spot of ground, and almost at that instant the shining hand vanished.

Mr. Greenwood went back to the house feeling somewhat dazed and bewildered. He found the door unfastened, and he had no difficulty in getting in. But when he reached his room he was under the impression that he had certainly been

dreaming, and to assure himself that he had not he lit his candle and mounted to the loft again, and there sure enough he beheld the broken box. And now a terrible thought began to haunt him—a thought that worked him into a fever of excitement—and at last he crept downstairs, having fully attired himself. He got into the stables, and, saddling a horse, set off at full speed to Carlisle, where he lost no time in obtaining an interview with the Mayor. He did not tell him, however, anything about the shining hand, fearing that he might be taken for a fool or a madman. But he stated that he had strong grounds for believing that the Chisholms had been guilty of a crime, and he requested that a warrant might be made out for their arrest, and that efficient and armed officers might be sent back with him to execute the warrant. On the strength of this definite statement the warrant was duly prepared, and half a dozen men sent to the Bell. The first thing Greenwood did then was to get two of them to dig in the Moss where he had pegged his handkerchief, and very soon the sickening fear that had been haunting him was realised, for the diggers came across the half decomposed corpse of Hugh Dewey. At that gruesome sight Mr. Greenwood nearly fainted, and he wept like a child when he remembered how he had suspected poor Dewey of being the thief.

The sequel is soon told. The Chisholms were all arrested on the charge of murder, and subsequently the youngest son made a clean breast of the affair, and he stated that he and his two brothers determined to murder Dewey, and bury him in the swamp, as his disappearance would give rise to the suspicion that he had stolen the box. He was killed by being struck on the head with a hammer while asleep, and the box was carried out and smashed up, and the property equally shared, and, before daylight came, the body had been disposed of, and the broken box hidden away in the lumber loft. The old people, although they had no hand in the crime, were cognisant of it, and received a share of the plunder. At the

trial which ensued in due course they were sentenced to transportation for life, while the three sons were condemned to death. The sentence on the youngest was subsequently commuted, but the others paid the penalty of their wrong. Mr. Greenwood never divulged by what means he discovered the crime, which was actually committed at the time and spot described, and was for long the talk of the country side. Nobody could be found to take the Bell, which gradually fell into ruins, and was at last razed to the ground as an accursed place. The remains of poor Dewey were conveyed to his native village at the expense of Mr. Greenwood's firm, and a marble monument was placed above his grave.

Much curiosity was naturally evinced to know how Mr. Greenwood had unearthed the crime so long afterwards, but he made no attempt to satisfy the curiosity. He did, however, write a long and circumstantial account of the mysterious appearance of the shining hand. That paper was kept by his family with many others after his death, and it is from the particulars given in that musty old MS. that this story has been compiled.

XV

A NIGHT WITH THE DEAD

In one of the London weeklies there occasionally appears an article from the pen of its gifted and genial editor under the distinctive heading of *Moi-même*, which, I need scarcely remind my readers, is the French term for myself. I almost think that *Moi-même* might have more appropriately stood at the head of this paper, although it would hardly have been so attractive perhaps as the one I have chosen, for what I have to relate is strictly a personal narrative. Probably it would not be an easy matter to find another man who could say that he had gone through a like experience as that I am about to relate, at an age when the young mind is peculiarly susceptible to the influences of terror, and suffered no permanent injury from it.

At the time that the thrilling incident occurred I was a youth of twelve; sturdy and active, with a spice of that spirit of recklessness in me which is peculiar to youths who are conscious of their strength and fond of adventure. I was a student—though, alas! I fear far from studious—at one of the pretentious establishments of the time known as 'Collegiate Schools for the Sons of Gentlemen.' This particular one at which I spent some years of my life was situated in what I shall ever consider one of the most beautiful parts of Cheshire, and the place was known as Bucklow Hill. Then it was a solitude of rural beauty, raised to a pitch of feverish

excitement twice a day by the arrival and departure of the stage coach. But at all other times a dreamy indolence seemed to hang about it, and its silence was only broken by the voices of Nature, or the whistling plough-boy as he lazily followed his team. The hostelry was a relic of a far-off time. Its massive signboard that creaked in the wind had seen several generations of men out. The heavily laden wains coming down from Knutsford or Northwich stopped before its doors, and the great horses blinked in the sun and emptied their nosebags, while the waggoners drank their 'yel' inside, seemingly oblivious of time, or if they remembered it it must have been with the contemptuous thought that 'time was made for slaves, not for jolly waggoners.' Bucklow Hill was indeed a peaceful spot. There the people led healthy, monotonous lives, and only died from extreme old age. The nearest railway station was eight miles off, and 'th' Squire' was lord of all. Two and a half miles away was the beautiful and romantic village of Rostherne, with its ancient Norman church, where we 'sons of gentlemen' were privileged to worship twice every Sunday. England, which is rich in beauty spots, could not at that time show many prettier, gem-like places than Rostherne. It will be observed that I speak in the past tense, for the Goths and Vandals have since vulgarised it, and destroyed its charm of antiquity.

Any one standing in Bowdon old churchyard, which is some twelve miles to the south of Manchester, and, gazing south on a clear, bright day, may behold a landscape that, for colouring, diversity, extent, and richness, is unique. At the time that I am dealing with, one of the features of this splendid picture was the square tower of Rostherne Church, as it peeped up over its embosoming trees. Rostherne is four miles away as the crow flies, and between it and Bowdon is a valley stretching right and left for many, many miles, so that the spectator on the rising ground of Bowdon Church, and where the depression precipitately commences, commands a bird's-eye view of the scene, and that Norman tower was so

conspicuous that it could not be overlooked.[1] Rostherne Church stands on the crest of a rounded hill that falls steeply on the north to the shores of an exquisite mere, which fills up a large natural hollow, and lends an additional charm to the beauty of the scene. In my day the village of Rostherne was a singularly primitive place, and the villagers were as rustic as villagers well could be. The churchyard was walled round by an irregular wall, to which clung the mould of the centuries, and tall trees kept watch and ward over the quiet dead. Entrance was gained through an ancient porch, the gate of which swung backwards and forwards by means of a ponderous wooden ball attached to a rope. Passing through this primitive gateway, you were in God's acre, where were to be seen tombstones hundreds of years old. The church, which was small, was built north and south, and in the ivy-covered tower hung a peal of sweet bells, which, when rung by the ringers, could be heard for many miles around.

For hundreds of years Rostherne Church has been the burial-place of the Egertons of Tatton, and in the church itself is a monument in pure white marble that was raised to perpetuate the memory of a Miss Egerton, who died young. The figure, which is life size, represents the lady lying on a cushion, and is one of the most exquisite things of the kind to be found in the country. Beneath this monument is the vault, where sleep generations and generations of Egertons. Entrance to this vault is gained from the outside, and it is necessary that I should give some particulars about it.

Near the east end of the church, and on the southern side,

[1] The beauty of this view has been much destroyed of late years by new buildings and railways, and the feature which lent so much picturesqueness, the tower of sweet Rostherne Church, no longer exists, for some iconoclastic Goth—who I know not—penetrated even into this delightful, sleepy hollow, and with ruthless and pitiless hand he tore from the tower its rich covering of ivy, the growth of centuries, then he levelled the tower, like a barbarian worthy of the close of the nineteenth century, and in its place reared a lofty and vulgar spire. Surely the ancient dead who sleep in the picturesque churchyard must have turned in their graves at this act of vandalism.

is a ponderous slab of stone, and this has to be raised when there is a tenant ready for the vault. Then is revealed a flight of steps after the earth has been cleared out, and the steps go down to a massive iron door. The door being opened, the chamber of death is disclosed. It is a large vaulted chamber, with a brick floor, and around on shelves repose the mighty sleepers.

Going back now, as I do, into the misty past, I come to a day when the iron door of this great vault stands open. For in Tatton Hall a dead Egerton lies ready to be carried to his eternal rest amongst his ancestors. The death chamber has been well ventilated by the door being allowed to remain open for hours, and the floor has been swept and garnished. It is a brilliant day, and the muffled tolling of the great bell seems out of place in a scene so fair, where winged things dance in the sunlight, and the hues of a thousand different flowers blend with the vivid greens of grass and trees. The air itself is heavy with the perfume of flowers, from which comes the drowsy hum of bees. The air seems to shiver every time the bell, with sonorous boom, groans out its message of death.

From that Collegiate School of which I have spoken a number of light-hearted, happy youths, I being one of them, have been marched, dressed in solemn black, and wearing black gloves, and in the church, now full of rich, golden light, they wait for the coming of the *cortège* which is to bring the dead man to his ancestors. Those youths, understanding not the import and great solemnity of death, look out of place, and feel out of place when all around is so bright and joyous, while the glittering lake below, and the rich, lush meadows about seem to invite them to sport. But a great man was dead, and it was meet that, though the sun, and the flowers, and the trees, and the birds, and bees, and butterflies could not be put into mourning, that these youngsters should assume a sorrow that they possessed not.

Presently the funeral procession approaches. The church

is filled now, and a strange and impressive hush falls upon the congregation, as sixteen men stagger up the aisle with their tremendous burden, for a dead Egerton is always encased in lead, and elm, and oak. With moving solemnity the beautiful service for the dead is recited, and the music of scores of youthful voices swell and fade with the swelling and fading of the organ.

This part of the service is long, and, owing to considerable delay in the arrival of the *cortège*, the day is already waning. At last the new tenant is borne down into the vault, which is illuminated for the nonce by candles, held against the walls by lumps of clay, and when he has been duly deposited upon his shelf the spectators are allowed to go down in little batches to look into that receptacle of dead humanity, which presently will be hermetically sealed up, and only opened again when another Egerton is ready for one of the remaining niches.

We youngsters from the school have been promised, as a treat, that we shall be allowed to go down into the vault, but there are hundreds to whom we nonentities have to give precedence. There are the members of the family, then the servants, next the tenants, followed by the villagers and the country folk, who had poured in from all parts. For the attraction of seeing the inside of a *vaut*, as these good Cheshire people call it, was irresistible. Consequently, we dispersed ourselves about the meadows and the woods and shores of the lake. We received orders to be back again in the churchyard in an hour and a half punctually.

I formed one of a merry little clique of bounding youngsters, who, being thus released from the gyves of a pained restraint that had lasted for hours, rushed with the thoughtlessness of youth into the woods, and awakened the echoes with shouts and laughter. Some funeral meats had been given to us on leaving the house, in the shape of a package of sandwiches, *i.e.*, some chunks of bread and wedges of meat, and a bun each—a wonderful bun! That bun haunts me

still. I have some sort of notion that it was made of sawdust and treacle, and encased in pieces of chamois leather. But how we tucked into that luncheon, and how we relished those buns! That they *did* digest is proved by the fact that I still live to write this record. My clique numbered some seven or eight. We were genial spirits; but were accounted wild young rascals, and evil examples to the other scholars, and often was it predicted that we should come to a bad end. So far as I know, however, not one of that clique ended his days on the scaffold, and I think one or two of them, if not more, rose to eminence. Still, there is no doubt that we had a touch of the demon in us, and like colts once let loose there was some difficulty in catching us again. Free as the wind we wandered, all unmindful of the flight of time, and instead of returning in an hour and a half, it was nearer four hours when we got back to the church, which was quite empty, and on one of the seats in the deep porch the ancient sexton slept the sleep of the just after his hard day's work. That antiquated man did not particularly love us, and was in the habit of referring to us 'sons of gentlemen' as 'the vagabondist ruffeenians as iver I've yeerd tell on.' That dear old dead-and-gone sexton spoke a language of his own, and at times the pranks we played upon him put him into such a fever heat that he was unable to speak any language at all: he could only growl and fume like some savage toothless old lion of the jungle.

For the time being we decided to leave his slumbers undisturbed, for the day was waning fast, and we were anxious to go down into the vault. Not a living soul was in the churchyard but ourselves. Our schoolmates had long since returned, the villagers had gone back to their homes, save such of them who lingered in the village public, in order that they might drown their sorrow in 'yel.' We alone were the truants. Somewhat gingerly we crept down into that place of the dead. For me, I must confess, it had a sort of fascination, and I gazed about me in awe and wonderment. Half a dozen

candles were still burning in their clay sconces, and one or two had been recently renewed. The polished shining coffin of the new-comer contrasted strikingly and strangely with the others, which appeared in every stage of decay.[1] There were some that were simply heaps of dust from which bones projected; others were falling to pieces, and the sides seemed to be bursting open; others again, though covered with dirt and mildew, were whole. In one corner I noted a heap of *débris* of coffins and remains, and I take it that this heap represented the mouldering relics of a very far off race that had been swept off the shelves to make room for later comers.

We did not linger very long in the charnel-house, and were glad to get into the open air again. Then, as we remembered the dear old sexton sleeping so quietly in the porch, the spirit of mischief entered into us. We were already in disgrace for not having returned at the proper time, and so we thought we might as well be 'hung for a sheep as a lamb'; besides, the temptation to revenge ourselves on the sexton for dubbing us 'vagabondist ruffeeninans' was too strong to be resisted by such ardent young spirits, and so we consulted together as to what form our revenge should take. At the foot of the tower was a large chamber, used as the receptacle for all sorts of lumber, such as grave planks, ropes, biers, matlocks, spades, &c., and we decided to search in this musty region for some pieces of cord wherewith to bind the somnolent sexton to the seat.

No sooner was the decision arrived at than off we scampered. Now, was it a mere chance or the fiend himself that caused a pot of green paint to be left standing on the ground in one corner, and lying across the pot were a big brush and a little brush? It must have been the archtempter of humanity that had put these things there, because a pot of green paint with two brushes were quite too strong a temptation for any mere mortal youths to resist, when within a few yards slept,

[1] If my memory serves me rightly, the vault had not been opened for thirty years previous to this.

on a wooden bench, a sexton, whose head was as bald and shiny as a billiard ball.

'Oh Geminy!' exclaimed a youth in the exuberance of his joy, 'here's a paint pot. Let us go and paint old Amen's skull.'

I should remark that we irreverently dubbed this ancient sexton 'Amen,' owing to a peculiarity he had of uttering the word in the responses. His voice was wheezy and cracked, and he used to dwell long upon the A—, sounding it like an R, and then dragging out the —men, until at last he ended it in his nose with a snort.

We voted the suggestion worthy of the genius who made it. But now came the question, who was to do the desperate deed? A sleeping sexton may not be any more dangerous than a sleeping lion unless you try to singe his beard. But then look out for squalls! As a volunteer for the work did not readily declare himself, let me say with the meekest of humility that I undertook the task.

Seizing the pot and small brush, I went boldly forth, followed by my giggling companions. Stealthily I crept into the porch, while they formed a little crowd about the entrance. Dipping the brush in the paint, I drew a broad band across that oval and shining skull, but the contact of the brush caused the owner of the skull to awaken. With the first move my companions bolted, and the paint pot falling from my hand overturned on the floor. What followed is like a dream still to me. In a sort of haze I see that fossil-like man with the painted skull make a desperate lunge at me, and then I've a notion that, slipping on the greasy, unctuous paint that covered the floor, he went down with a crash and a yell.

With one bound I got outside, but where to run to I knew not, until it flashed through my brain that the vault would afford me splendid shelter until the sexton's wrath had expended itself. Down the steps I scuttered, and certainly at that moment the dead had less terror for me than the living. As I stood there with fluttering heart and panting breath, I

thought I heard the old man's footsteps on the gravel above; and in my distress, and with that thoughtlessness peculiaro boyhood, I pushed the ponderous iron door behind which I was standing, when to my horror it swung on its well-oiled hinges, closed with a solid bang, and I was a prisoner in the tomb!

For some moments I was like one petrified, and I thought that from those ghastly relics on the shelves came mocking peals of laughter. In a few minutes I had recovered my presence of mind, and then frantically I tried to open the door. But to have set myself the task of lifting from the shelf the newly-arrived tenant, encased as he was in lead and oak and elm, would not have been more impossible of accomplishment than to open that iron door from the inside. My recollection is that it was a perfectly smooth plate, without chink, ridge, boss, or angle of any kind, and it fitted into its iron framework like a carpenter's dovetail. I was too surely a prisoner with the dead, and unless released from the outside my bones would moulder with those of the Egertons. In my terror I shouted, but my voice came back to me in a hundred echoes, until I was sure the dead Egertons were laughing in their coffins, and my tongue refused utterance more. My flesh crept; my blood turned to ice, and cold, clammy drops of perspiration rolled down my face and neck.

I have spoken of the candles which were stuck against the wall by means of balls of plastic clay. I think there were five of these candles, two being over the new coffin. These had not been long burning, two-thirds of their length, at least, remaining. Another in an opposite corner had burnt down to about an inch, another was more than half burnt through, and a fifth was just expiring, the snuff hanging down on the clay.

It is evidence of my presence of mind not having deserted me that I was able to note these details, and even do something more than note them. To be imprisoned in the charnel-house was horrible, but to be there in the darkness was still

more horrible, and it must have struck me in this way, because with the courage of desperation, I took down and put out every candle but one, so as to economise them. When that one was nearly burnt out I should be able to light another piece, and so keep a light for a long time.

The feeble rays of this common dip did little more than reveal the darkness, and, with a sense of awful terror, I crouched down on the floor close to the iron door, clutching with nervous energy my precious morsels of candles. I heard my own heart beating, and I strained my ears to try and catch the sounds of footsteps on the outside; but never a sound came to me. How could it through such a mass of iron? I closed my eyes, but when I did that my imagination led me to picture the dead Egertons in the mouldering coffins stretching forth their skeleton hands to clutch me, so I opened them again. For a few moments they rested on that flickering dip, which certainly did seem to me to burn blue, and then they wandered nervously from shelf to shelf, until from the gloom they evolved sheeted skeletons rising up and grinning at me, and I closed them again to shut out the horrid sight. Over and over again this opening and shutting of the eyes was repeated, always with the same sensations; and as my nervousness increased and my imagination grew by what it fed upon, I felt certain that I saw things moving and heard strange sounds. The horror of the situation I do not think it would be possible to over-colour by any word-painting, however expressive it might be.

In that wonderful collection of works by a mad genius, the Wiertz Gallery at Brussels, there is one picture which, as an artistic representation of unutterable horror, is probably without a parallel in the world. It represents an old woman in grave cerements bursting from a coffin, in which she has been encased while in a trance. She has awakened in the coffin, and in her awful fear has splintered the head part of the lid, and through the aperture has forced her head and

shoulders. The jagged edges of the wood have torn strips of flesh from her body, and she is covered with blood. But, oh! the pitiful horror of the face! The eyes are bulged out of the head, the greenish white face is convulsed with a grin of madness; the blue lips are drawn apart, and the tongue is lolling out, while the hair literally stands on end. The canvas is so arranged that a faint green light falls upon it, and you look at it through a small magnifying glass. Every detail is thus brought out, and the arrangement of the light is such that it heightens the startling ghastliness of the subject.

Some years ago, when I saw this picture for the first time, I felt that here, depicted on canvas, was a pictorial representation of the horror I experienced on the terrible night that I passed with the dead in the Egertons' tomb. Let it be remembered that I was but twelve years of age, with far more imaginative than reasoning power, for few boys at that age—except the prodigies, who never live long—do reason, and it is a fact, not without some psychological value, that the new coffin did not inspire me with any fear. Perhaps in some vague and undefined way I had a notion that the new lead and elm and oak were sufficient to prevent the ghost of *that* dead man coming forth. But the rent coffins and the heaps of *débris*, those were what fascinated me with a stony fear. And I watched them, and watched, and watched, until my strained eyes ached, and still I watched; how long may be judged by the fact that I suddenly noticed that the candle had all but burnt down to the clay, and with a cry—I am sure I cried out—I sprang from my cramped position, lighted another candle, and got back again to the door.

Presently—I will not undertake to say how long it was after I had put up the fresh candle, for the half-paralysed brain in such cases is incapable of measuring time—I saw from the heap of *débris* in the corner a skull roll out on to the floor, and grin at me with its chapless face. Then some minutes later various bones came out of the heap, and attach-

ing themselves to the skull and to each other in anatomical order, they made a perfect skeleton, that gradually rose up and performed a dance Macabre. I tried to avert my gaze from this awful sight, but could not. My eyes were riveted there with an appalling fascination. I heard the rattling of the skeleton's bones, and the clicking of its jaw as it worked it about with an idiotic grin, and soon I heard something move. There was a terrible banging and crashing, and with a glance I saw that the various old coffins on the shelves had burst open, and their fleshless occupants were sitting up rattling their jaws, and sawing the air with their skeleton arms. Then suddenly, and as if by some signal, they all sprang to the ground. There were a couple of dozen of them at least, and amongst them, strangely enough, was one clad in complete armour. Where he came from I do not know, as I had not noticed him amongst those on the shelves. He wore a helmet, and his vizor was down, while in his bony hand he grasped a cross-handled sword.

This extraordinary apparition seemed to inspire me with additional terror, for by some strange instinct I knew that he meant me harm. The others all crowded round him as if to prevent him getting near me, and he moved backwards and forwards, making feints and dodges to escape them, and suddenly he did manage to elude their vigilance, and raising his ponderous sword with both hands he was about to aim a terrific blow at me, when suddenly between me and him there stood a radiant figure. It was a figure of pure, white marble, and yet it moved. Waving a white arm it warned him off, and he cowered back into a corner, and then it fixed its pitying and pensive eyes on me. It was the beautiful effigy from the monument in the church above. That effigy upon which I had so often gazed with lingering and loving admiration, and many and many a time during the Sunday services I had, like one in a waking dream, given that marble lady colour, and warmth, and life; and often as I did so a dumb voice within me said:

'How beautiful you are, and being so beautiful how good you must have been, and being so beautiful and so good you could only have died so young because God was short of an angel for His choir!'

That was ever my unuttered thought, for the magnificent marble effigy was to me a poem, and I loved it. And now in this awful moment, when the wrathful knight in armour would have slain me, that sweet lady had come to save me from his fury. Once more she waved her fair round arm, and all those gruesome skeletons went back to their coffins, and she gradually faded away until she appeared as a rosy star that continued to hover over me for a long time, until oh, joy! the ponderous door swung open, and one of the gravediggers, a man well known to me, entered.

At first he staggered, and was startled on beholding me, but, recognising me, he seized me in his brawny arms, and rushed up the steps. It was a glorious morning. The sun was rising, birds were singing in every tree. The night had passed, and for many hours I had been entombed with the dead. Had I really seen what I have related, or did I dream it? Whichever it was, I had spent such a night of terror that the wonder is I lived through it.

It remains for me to tell, as I subsequently learned, that the sexton, having exhausted himself with a fruitless chase, had descended the steps of the vault to close the door for the night, but, finding it closed, he concluded that one of the gravediggers had been there before him. At six o'clock in the morning the gravedigger had entered the vault to see that nothing had been left in, preparatory to its being hermetically sealed up, and so he had discovered me. I was lying stretched on the floor grasping the pieces of candle in my hand. My companions, having missed me on the previous evening, concluded I had hurried back to the school, and so they went home also. My non-arrival within a reasonable time caused some consternation. I say *some*, because on one or two previous occasions I had absented myself all night, and had

gone to some friends of my family who resided in Bowdon. To these friends a messenger was despatched the first thing in the morning, but before he returned I put in an appearance, and the narration of what I had gone through saved me from the punishment which otherwise would have been meted out.

On the following Sunday, as I filed into the church with my schoolmates, I caught sight of the old sexton, and I noted that on his polished cranium there were still traces of the green band I had painted there, and which had caused me to pass that terrible night with the dead, the memory of which will never leave me until memory itself is no more.

XVI

THE BLOOD DRIPS

AN UNSOLVED MYSTERY

For a long time—for years, in fact—at short intervals, the following advertisement appeared in most, if not all, the London papers, and many of the provincial ones:

> TO LET, on long lease at low rental, or Freehold to be sold cheap, a magnificent Family Residence, complete with every convenience, suitable for a large family. The house stands in its own grounds, comprising nearly three and a half acres, part of which is natural wood, while the remainder is laid out as flower and kitchen gardens. There is stabling for four or five horses, with commodious carriage house, harness room, hay and corn lofts, and spacious apartments for coachmen, grooms, &c. The property, which is only twenty-five miles from London, enjoys an unequalled situation both as regards salubrity and views. The country is open all round, with extensive woods in the neighbourhood. The climate is bracing; gravel soil lying on chalk, an adequate supply of water, and drainage perfect. Apply in the first instance to Smeaton, Weardale & Smeaton, Estate and House Agents, Valuers and Auctioneers, &c., 105 New Bond Street, London, W.

On the first blush this advertisement was very attractive, and its *bonâ fides* was beyond question, seeing that such a well-known and old-established firm as Smeaton, Weardale & Smeaton was responsible for it. But a second reading would naturally have caused any thinking person to ask himself why, if this property was all that was represented, it should be offered at a very low rental, or cheaply if bought.

Now, it was very certain that there was something wrong, otherwise 'a magnificent family residence,' and 'three and a half acres of ground' need not wait long for a customer. But, as already stated, this advertisement continued to appear at short intervals for years, so that those who were familiar with it knew quite well that out of the hundreds of thousands of people who must have read it, no one had yet been induced to invest. Now, what was the object in continuing the advertisement, upon which a large sum of money must have been spent, if a customer was not forthcoming? The only answer to this was that the owner or owners of the property hoped that by continuing it long enough, the advertisement would at last attract the right person, and in the end this hope was realised.

One morning—an August morning it was, brilliant with sunlight, when even grimy London looked bright and cheerful—a gentleman entered the office of Smeaton, Weardale & Smeaton. There was something about him that suggested long residence abroad—his dress and appearance generally. He wore a soft grey felt hat, a large, flowing necktie, and loose collar, and a grey check suit of clothes, which, though faultless as to their cut, had never been made in England, or, at any rate, not in London. For your London tailor has a style which, to the practised eye, is unmistakable. The gentleman was evidently an invalid or a convalescent. He was thin, languid, and delicate looking. There were dark rims under his eyes, and, though his face was tanned with sun, it was greyish in its hue, and suggestive of an undermined constitution.

Smeaton, Weardale & Smeaton's offices were extensive, and luxuriously fitted, as became a first-class firm of estate agents in so fashionable a neighbourhood as New Bond Street. The gentleman was received by a page-boy, and shown into a waiting-room, which was furnished with velvet lounges and chairs, and plentifully supplied with newspapers.

'I wish to see one of the principals,' said the gentleman, handing the page-boy his card, on which was engraved:

WALTER REGINALD MINTON, M.E.,
British Columbia.

The boy bowed, took the card, and retired. In a few minutes an obsequious clerk entered, and with many bows requested Mr. Walter Reginald Minton to 'kindly step this way, sir.'

Mr. Minton followed the clerk, who showed him into a large, handsomely-furnished room, the walls of which were covered with photographs of houses of all kinds and coloured plans of estates. At a massive mahogany desk sat a well-preserved gentleman long past the prime of life, but with silver hair, a bright, keen eye, and a rubicund face that suggested a fondness for good living and old crusted port.

'Do I address Mr. Smeaton?' asked the stranger.

'Yes, sir. I am the head of the firm. Pray, take a chair,' and Mr. Smeaton put his white, fat hands together with professional dignity, and waited for his visitor to state his business.

'I've noticed an advertisement in the *Times*,' began Mr. Minton, taking from his pocket-book a half sheet of note-paper, on which the advertisement alluded to had been neatly gummed. 'It has reference to the sale of a family residence, and I should like to have some further particulars about it.'

Mr. Smeaton's eyes brightened up with joyful expectancy, as, glancing at the sheet of note-paper, he recognised the advertisement which had become fossilised, so to speak, in the London dailies.

'Oh, yes,' he answered pleasantly, and with a most becoming smile. 'The advertisement accurately describes the property.'

'Where is it situated?'

'About six miles from —— Station on the South-Eastern line—an hour's run from London.'

'There will be no difficulty in my seeing it?'

'Oh, none whatever.'

'I may mention that I am a mining engineer, and have been for many years in British Columbia. But having made a moderate fortune, and being in very bad health, I am anxious to settle down in my native country.'

'Ah, just so,' remarked Mr. Smeaton blandly, and stroking his smoothly-shaven chin. 'Are you a family man, Mr. Minton, may I ask?'

'Yes, I have a wife and one daughter, twenty years of age.'

Mr. Smeaton's countenance seemed to fall just ever so little, as he replied:

'Umph! I am afraid then if your family is so small you may find the house larger than you require.'

'Oh, no,' answered Minton quickly, and Mr. Smeaton's countenance recovered again; 'we like a large house, for we keep a good deal of company.'

'Then I don't think you can do better than purchase Dumthorpe Hall,' said Mr. Smeaton, with a gracious smile.

'Is that the name of the place?'

'Yes. Of course, if you become the owner you will be at liberty to adopt any other name you like. Now, I suggest, before entering into any further particulars, that we go down and see the property; you couldn't have a better day. The country will be charming under this brilliant sun. If you will allow me I shall have much pleasure in accompanying you.'

'That will suit me admirably. I am staying at the Tavistock Hotel; we can call there in a cab, and pick up my wife and daughter.'

Mr. Smeaton struck his bell, and the page-boy appeared with such alacrity that one might have thought that the bell set some spring in motion which shot the boy into the room.

'Peter, look up the next train for ——.'

'Yes, sir.' Two minutes later the boy came back. 'There is a train at 12.50, sir.'

'Good!' Mr. Smeaton looked at his massive gold watch, although a handsome clock stood on the mantelpiece, the force of habit, no doubt: 'We have an hour and a half—ample time; and as I have a little business to do, perhaps you will permit me to meet you at the station?'

'Oh, certainly.'

A few minutes later Mr. Minton was on his way to his hotel; and, punctual to the time, he and his wife, a charming but delicate and nervous-looking lady, and his daughter, a no less charming girl, were at the station, where Mr. Smeaton had already arrived and procured first-class tickets.

On alighting at ——, after an hour's run through a pleasant country, a brougham and pair of horses, which Mr. Smeaton had ordered by telegraph from the landlord of the hotel near the station, were waiting, and the party at once drove to Dumthorpe Hall, a distance of over six miles from the station.

'I should mention,' remarked Mr. Smeaton, just before reaching the place, 'that the property has, unfortunately been allowed to fall into a somewhat dilapidated condition, for the owner, who is in India, has sadly neglected it. However, that will be duly taken into consideration in fixing the purchase money.'

As regards the situation, the advertisement had scarcely done it justice. The country, diversified with wood, hill and dale, was charming, and looked at its very best on this brilliant summer's day. The entrance to the grounds of Dumthorpe Hall was through a gateway, the gates being wrought-iron, and of a handsome design, but now rusty, and out of the perpendicular, owing to the sinking of the foundations of one of the pillars on which they were hung. Some difficulty, therefore, was experienced in getting in. There was a small lodge at the entrance, but it was overrun with ragged creepers, and the windows were covered with the accumulated dirt of years.

As the visitors stood for a few moments looking about

them, after the difficulty of opening the gate had been overcome, Miss Minton suddenly uttered a startled cry, and clung in alarm to her father's arm.

'What is it, what is it, my dear?' he asked quickly.

'Oh, look there!' she exclaimed, pointing with her parasol to the ground a few feet away; and he did look and beheld an adder leisurely moving across the pathway. Mr. Smeaton saw it too, and, springing forward, he struck the reptile with his stick, killing it at once, and he tossed it among the trees out of sight.

'If I were superstitious,' remarked Mr. Minton, 'I should take that as an evil omen.'

'I am glad you are not superstitious,' replied Mr. Smeaton with a laugh, 'for the fact is this place has the reputation of being haunted.'

He uttered this quickly—jerked it out, as it were—as though he was glad to get it off his mind, the incident of the snake having given him the opportunity of making the remark.

'Haunted!' exclaimed the two ladies in a breath, while something like a scared appearance came into their faces.

'Of course that won't affect you, ladies,' said Mr. Smeaton with his bland smile. 'You are above being affected by such silly nonsense, I am sure.'

They walked on, the brougham followed slowly. The drive was all overgrown with moss and grass, and strewn with decaying leaves and pieces of branches of trees that had been whirled off by gales. Presently the drive took a turn, then expanded, and the house came in view. It was an old Elizabethan mansion, with pointed gables and a red-tiled roof that gave it a very quaint appearance; but it looked forlorn and mouldering to decay, even with the sun pouring down a flood of golden light upon it. Had it been seen under less favourable atmospheric conditions it would certainly have worn a repellent aspect. Ivy and honeysuckle had struggled to the very eaves, and hung in straggling and ragged festoons about the windows.

The interior of the Hall was worse than the exterior. Cobwebs hung from the ceilings in long ropes. The paper had peeled from the walls; the fire grates were red with rust; the windows obscured with dirt; the floors black, and in some places rotten; while pervading the whole house was a dank, earthy, mouldering smell, like that which comes from a newly-opened tomb.

The ladies shuddered, and were evidently repelled by the cheerlessness and gloom of the house. But Mr. Smeaton chatted pleasantly and glibly. He had a smooth tongue and great fluency, and knew how to say pretty things in dulcet tones. He was very anxious to get the property off his hands, and as Mr. Minton seemed a likely customer he was not going to let him slip if talking would secure him. The premises were thoroughly examined. They certainly were commodious and not ill-planned, but paint, paper, and white-wash everywhere wanted renewing. The same neglect characterised the grounds. They were howling wilder-nesses of ill weeds, and the conservatories were falling to pieces.

The ladies certainly were not impressed, although they expressed admiration for the position and view; and there could be no doubt that the situation was healthy, for it stood high; gravel and chalk were the geological features for miles round, and the air was singularly pure, while the water was liquid crystal.

'Well,' said Mr. Minton, reflecting when the survey was over, 'I can see certain potentialities in that place.'

'Potentialities! I should think so, my dear sir,' exclaimed the agent joyfully. 'With the expenditure of a little money it can be made into a palace.'

Without answering this remark, Mr. Minton, turning to his wife and daughter, said:

'What is your opinion, darlings?'

'Well,' answered his wife cautiously, 'we have seen it under every possible disadvantage as far as neglect and dirt

go, and I think it would want a lot of money-spending to put it in order.'

'But what is the story about its being haunted?' asked the young lady, addressing Mr. Smeaton, and unable to suppress a little shudder.

Mr. Smeaton laughed loudly, almost boisterously, as he made reply:

'My—dear—young lady, such stories as these are always so ridiculous that they cannot be discussed by sensible people.'

He dismissed the subject with his bland smile and a lofty wave of his white hand.

As they returned to town, Mr. Minton for the first time asked the price, and the figure named by Mr. Smeaton was so low that the other opened his eyes in astonishment.

'Is there anything the matter with the place?' Mr. Minton asked with great point.

'Nothing; I pledge you my honour,' answered the agent equally emphatic, 'beyond its reputation as a haunted house, but it is right to say that that reputation has kept the place untenanted for twenty years with one short break. It was let on a yearly tenancy to a family who only remained, however, six months.'

'Why did they leave?' asked the two ladies in concert.

'They said that they heard noises, and that what looked like blood dripped from the ceilings.'

'Oh!' exclaimed the mother and daughter with a little start, and nestling closer to each other, as if for mutual protection.

Mr. Minton smiled sceptically, and this smile did not escape the agent, who said quickly:

'I have told you frankly the cause of our not being able to let or sell the place. That is the sole reason; and it certainly does not say much for our boasted enlightenment that so splendid a property should go begging through such a senseless cause.'

'You are right, you are right!' exclaimed Mr. Minton, and the other felt from this that the customer was secured.

The following day, Mr. Minton, not wholly with his wife's and daughter's approbation, instructed his lawyers to make further inquiries, and examine the title deeds. The inquiries elicited nothing beyond what the agent had stated, namely, that people said it was haunted; while, as for the title deeds, they were beyond dispute or quibble. The price asked was very low. but Mr. Minton's lawyers offered a still lower price, and, as the agents' instructions were to sell at any price rather than let the place fall into absolute ruin, the bargain was closed, and Mr. Minton became the absolute possessor of Dumthorpe Hall. He immediately set a little army of workmen to work—gardeners, painters, paperhangers, plumbers, &c., as he was anxious to move in before the winter. Very soon the place had been transformed, and the prejudice of the ladies gave way. As they saw the change they expressed themselves delighted. As soon as the workmen were out, the upholsterers entered, and as they had carte-blanche to furnish the house thoroughly and well, they had soon diffused comfort, warmth, and beauty where erstwhile all was decay and mildew.

It was the last week in October when the family moved in. The autumn tints were on the land, but beyond that there was no trace of the approaching winter. The days were still warm and bright and sunny, for it had been an exceptionally fine season. A number of servants were already installed. The greenhouses and conservatories were filled with flowers; the gardens were already bright and gay; while in the stables were horses and carriages. In fact, the place was complete with everything that could give comfort or enjoyment to the family. Mr. Minton was a liberal provider, and being wealthy —having made his pile out of mines in British Columbia—he spared no expense.

For the first few weeks all went merry as a marriage bell. The ladies expressed themselves charmed with the place. The dark days of November were drawing to a close, and the house

was full of visitors, when one morning the cook approached Mrs. Minton, and said:

'Can I speak to you, mum, for a few minutes?'

'Certainly, cook. What is it?'

'Well, mum,' she began sheepishly, 'I've been awfully annoyed for several nights by somebody walking about over my head.'

'Oh, nonsense, cook. That couldn't be. The room over you is a lumber-room, and it's just filled up with boxes.'

'Yes, mum, I know that, and that's what makes the noise all the queerer. And then yesterday morning something came down from the ceiling in the kitchen like blood.'

Mrs. Minton turned a little pale and shuddered, for she remembered that the agent had mentioned the story about blood dripping from the ceiling.

'What an extraordinary thing!' she said, with a forced laugh; 'but the next time you are troubled with these phenomena, cook, pray come and call me.'

The cook did not seem quite satisfied as she went away; and that night, about ten o'clock, she went to her mistress again with a scared white face, and said:

'It's there again, mum. Will you please to come to my room?'

Mrs. Minton went, and to her surprise she heard a steady measured tramp, tramp, tramp, overhead. She sent for her husband. He came, and he heard the same sounds. He went into the room above, but there was nothing to account for those footsteps. In fact, so full was the room of boxes, trunks, &c., that there was not a clear floor space of two yards.

Mrs. Minton did not go into the upper room. She waited for her husband coming down; and suddenly, as she was looking up towards the ceiling, something wet fell on her face. She uttered a little startled cry, and, taking out her handkerchief, wiped the wet off, and what was her astonishment to find that the handkerchief was stained with blood, or what seemed like blood. Such a shock did this cause her that she

almost fainted, and when her husband returned she was pale and trembling. He expressed himself mystified, and it was evident that he was very much impressed. It was agreed that nothing should be said about this to anyone in the house, and the cook was enjoined to keep the matter secret for the present. But the following morning after breakfast the gentlemen retired to the smoking-room for a few whiffs, when a young fellow named Dobell called out as he filled his pipe :

'I say, Minton, old fellow, who is lodging over me ?'

'I don't think anyone is over you. In fact I am sure there is not. Why ?'

'Well, I don't know, but it seemed to me that some fellow with heavy boots did nothing but tramp about all night.'

Mr. Minton started. He could not help it, and he who had indignantly disavowed any belief in the supernatural was becoming superstitious. He laughed the matter off, however, and told his friend that he must have been suffering from nightmare.

For the next two or three days nothing else occurred, or at any rate was mentioned, until Miss Minton went into her mother's room in a state of great fright, and exclaimed :

'Oh, mamma, I've had such a shock. As I was dressing something fell from the ceiling on to my face and neck, and when I wiped it off it was like blood.'

Mrs. Minton grew deadly pale as she heard this, but, recovering herself quickly, she answered :

'Well, darling, I have experienced the same thing, but it is better to say nothing about it. As long as it is not more serious we must put up with it. When the guests have gone we will have the house examined. Possibly some trick is being played.'

Although she thus dismissed the subject for the time being she could not get rid of the mystery so easily, and that strange drip from the ceilings was impartial, for it dripped on all alike, and in all parts of the house. Other ladies and gentlemen complained of it, and the ladies became alarmed ; while

a thorough investigation organised by the gentlemen was entirely barren of result. They could discover nothing, absolutely nothing, and the ceilings, which had all been newly whitened, were stainless. These people felt they were in the presence of some mystery which they could not solve. But what was it? Of course the gentlemen scoffed, and even some of the stronger-minded ladies pooh-poohed. But there were others who held their peace, and, as soon as they could courteously do so, they took their departure.

Mr. Minton was greatly concerned. If this sort of thing was to continue he would hardly get guests to stay with him, while, as for his wife and daughter, it was evident they were suffering in their nerves. Then a fresh trouble arose; some of the servants gave notice to leave, saying they were afraid to stay in such a place. The cook, who was an exceedingly good servant, and liked her place, was loath to go, but she said that she would certainly have to leave if the annoyances did not stop.

It need scarcely be said that the matter preyed upon Mr. Minton's mind. He had spent a large sum of money upon the house, and to be the victim of such an unsolvable annoyance was a great hardship.

As Christmas approached things seemed to get worse. Those drips from the ceilings were constantly falling, and the tramping, which was confined to two rooms, still went on. It became very obvious to Mr. Minton that his wife and daughter were suffering in health, though they tried not to show it, and he became greatly concerned.

A new set of guests came down for Christmas, and care was taken not to put anyone into the room below that where the tramping was heard. But people complained, nevertheless, of red moisture dripping on them from the ceilings, and nervous people became frightened. Mr. Minton was not a man to be easily subdued. As a mining engineer, he had faced dangers in all shapes and forms, and had overcome difficulties that would have daunted less determined and less

strong-minded men. But now this constant interruption to his domestic comfort and peace was telling sorely upon his already shattered health. He had come here for quietude and rest, but in spite of his care and lavish expenditure it seemed as if his hopes were doomed to be blighted. As he was not quite able to divest himself of the idea that he was the victim of some stupid trickery, he, with the aid of a builder from the neighbouring town, examined the house from roof to basement, and all the time that he was pursuing his investigation that mysterious dripping of a fluid like blood continued from the ceilings, and the tramping in the lumber-room never ceased at night time. The examination, therefore, resulted in nothing, and the mystery was a mystery still.

At last, driven to desperation, Mr. Minton resolved to try another expedient. That was to clear out the lumber-room, have a bed put up there, and sleep in the room himself. This he did against the earnest, prayerful entreaties of his wife and daughter, and even of the servants. But he was resolute, saying he had never feared living man, and nothing dead could harm him.

The arrangements completed, he wished his wife and daughter a fond good-night, and when they exacted a promise from him that he would violently ring his bell if he required assistance, he laughed heartily, and retired to what had now come to be called in the house 'the haunted room.' His wife and daughter were restless and uneasy, but as the hours sped, and there was no sound of the bell, they dropped off to sleep.

In the morning, about nine o'clock, Mr. Minton's valet went up to the room with hot water. He knocked at the door, there was no response. He knocked again, still no answer, so he tried the handle; it yielded, and he entered. Then from his hand fell the hot-water jug he was carrying, and he staggered back with a wild cry of alarm. For lying on the bed, his limbs all contorted, the sheets twisted about his body like ropes, as if he had rolled and writhed in some torturing

agony, his eyes starting from his head in horror, his mouth wide open, his hands clenched, the nails digging into the palms, was Mr. Minton, stone dead.

Medical men were hastily summoned, but their services were of no avail. They could only certify that Mr. Minton, being in very delicate health, had received a shock of some sort, which had caused death. 'A shock of some sort!' That was only too painfully evident. It did not need a medical man to state that. What they could not state was how the shock had been produced.

Poor Mrs. Minton and her daughter were carried prostrated from the fatal house to a neighbour's, and they only entered it once again to take a last look at the remains of the husband and father. When he had been borne to his final resting-place, his widow instructed her lawyers to sell off all the furniture immediately. That done, the accursed house was shut up, and it remained shut for over a dozen years. No one could be found to take it; and, at last, only a few years ago, the estate was sold, the house razed to the ground, and some small villas erected on the land, and Dumthorpe Hall became only a memory.

Many people will no doubt remember what a fierce controversy raged at the time of Mr. Minton's tragic death, and how nearly every paper in the kingdom, big and little, advanced some theory to try and account for the phenomena which had alarmed servants and guests alike. Some of the papers discussed the affair banteringly, some with glib platitudes about the 'pitiable superstition which still lingered in some of the remote country districts'; others, again, half seriously, and others still with appalling learnedness. Divines and laymen alike entered into the conflict of opinions, but in the end nothing was proved, nothing was solved, and the extraordinary mystery remains a mystery still.

XVII

THE DREAM THAT CAME TRUE

A WOMAN'S STORY

In the autumn of the year 18— I went down to a quiet little village in the borderland of Dumfriesshire, intending to spend a few weeks there for the sake of rest and change. For three years I had been engaged in teaching in Glasgow, and overstudy, together with the climate and smoke of that grimy city, had undermined my health, so that rest and quiet had become an imperative necessity. I went to the village I speak of by the advice of my doctor, who told me that the air was bracing, the country round about delightful, and the place a perfect sleepy hollow, while I should be able to live there for, as he put it, 'an old song.' This to me was a great consideration, for my purse was slender, and I was a delicate woman, dependent upon my own exertions for a livelihood. Under these circumstances my doctor's recommendation was not to be ignored, and, through his instrumentality, I obtained lodgings in a small farm, occupied by kindly and homely people, who knew little of the world beyond their own neighbourhood. The good wife was some sixty years of age, and dearly loved a crack. She was chatty and gossipy, and seemed to know the histories of all the people in the village and its neighbourhood from their birth upwards. In the course of a week she had enlightened me as to who everyone was, seeming to take a keen delight in repeating every little bit of scandal,

with a running commentary of her own. I was not particularly interested in the old body's chatter, but it rather amused me than otherwise, and, as it seemed to afford her pleasure, I allowed her to rattle on, while I was content to sit in a large old-fashioned chair and dose in dreamy indolence.

'I was minding,' she said to me one day regretfully, 'that there's ane person that I havena telt ye aboot. But the fac' is I dinna ken aught aboot her mysel' We ca' her the Mystery. But she's a puir, daft-like creature, and is no muckle worth troubling aboot.'

My interest was at once thoroughly aroused, for I saw instantly that my landlady's disrespectful way of speaking arose from a sense of wounded vanity at not having been able to learn anything about this mysterious person, who, I felt sure, must be remarkable since she had been able to defy the prying impertinence of this old woman.

'Indeed!' I remarked; 'and where does this Mystery live?'

'Weel, maybe you've seen an auld ragged-looking hoose just beyond the village there to the east? It stands in a bit ground, and has a lot of green stuff growing up it.'

I had to confess that I had not noticed this particular house, whereupon my entertainer expressed great surprise, and went on to inform me that for a long time it had been without a tenant, but at last had been bought by its present occupant, who had resided in it ever since with one servant, an old woman, who, according to this dear old gossip's account, was 'waur than the mistress, for folk couldna get a thing oot o' her.'

I was amused at the indignant way in which my landlady spoke, as though she considered—and as a matter of fact she did so consider—that she and the little community had been scandalised and outraged by this mysterious lady not at once proclaiming her whole history for the benefit of the gossips. To her it seemed really shameful, but to me this reticence presented itself in the light of a virtue, and I felt drawn

towards the unknown lady by a bond of sympathy. She bore the somewhat uncommon name, as I learnt, of Slark—Mrs. Lydia Slark. She went to the village church every Sunday, owed no one a penny in the place, was quiet and uncommunicative, and neither visited nor received visitors. This was the sum and substance of what was known about her; and a person who could thus keep her affairs to herself in so small a community was sure to be looked upon with suspicion, and spoken of as a mystery, while dark hints might even be dropped that such a remarkably reticent person must be in league with the Evil One himself.

Now, being a woman, my curiosity was naturally stimulated by this information, and though I did not like tittle-tattle, and never concerned myself about other folks' private business, I could not avoid a secret desire to know something of this mysterious lady, who had so successfully defied the scrutiny of a whole village.

A day or two later I made my way towards the residence of Mrs. Slark. It was a sombre day, and the brown, withered leaves—last sad relics of summer glories—lay thickly strewn about the roads and lanes, ever and anon being whirled around in little columns by the fitful gusts of wind that swept across the land, heralding the approach of winter. Little of the house could be seen from the road, owing to intervening trees and shrubs. Wishing to get a better view of it, I pushed open the heavy iron gate, which creaked with a sort of complaint at being disturbed from its rusty indolence. I advanced for some yards up the pathway until I was enabled to obtain a full view of the building. It was a large, old-fashioned brick house, the walls almost hidden from view by clustering ivy. The grounds were overgrown with weeds and rank grass, and there was not a single patch of cultivation to relieve the eye. The entrance to the house was by a porch, over which a wild honeysuckle had straggled in the wildest disorder, and hung down in ragged festoons, giving the place a forlorn and neglected appearance. With one exception, every window

was shrouded by a dingy, yellow blind. Before the porch in the centre of a little circular plot of rusty green grass was a fountain with a stucco basin, in which were a few inches of dirty water, and a figure that had fallen from its pedestal. It was a composition statue of a female half draped, but now it was covered with slime and dirt.

As I gazed on all this desolation I thought of Edgar Allan Poe's 'House of Usher,' and I almost expected to see this neglected building sink with a crash beneath my feet. As I was about to turn and leave the grounds I was suddenly arrested by the shrill trilling of a canary, and, looking in the direction from whence the sounds proceeded, I saw that the little songster was hung in a gilded cage at the only window not screened by a blind. But it was not the only thing I saw, for a lady was standing there also. I felt ashamed of myself for having thus intruded, and commenced to retrace my steps, but before I was hidden by the trees I heard a cough, and, looking round, saw the lady on the doorstep. I felt now that I could not retreat without some few words of excuse for my rudeness, so, going back, I began to stammer forth something about my being a stranger in the place, and to mumble apologies for intruding on her privacy. I noted that the lady was about fifty years of age, and of commanding presence. She had once been beautiful, and even then there were traces of beauty remaining, though sorrow and time together had ploughed ruts in the once fair brow. She had soft, tender, blue eyes, and the hair, though iron grey, was abundant, and braided in thick plaits, which were twisted round the head somewhat in the old German fashion. In the face itself there was such an expression of sadness that I felt drawn towards her, a sadness that was by no means expelled, but rather emphasised, by the smile with which she greeted me.

'You seem interested in my poor abode,' she remarked in a musical and plaintive voice.

'I am afraid I have been excessively rude,' I replied, 'but the fact is——'

'Pray, do not excuse yourself,' she returned kindly. 'I saw that you were a stranger, for I know by sight all the people round about. It is not often I am honoured with visitors, more especially a lady, and if you will please to come in and partake of my humble hospitality you are very welcome.'

I was naturally astonished at this freely proffered invitation, for I had been led to imagine that the owner of the house was a morose, surly person, who shunned all intercourse with her fellows. But instead of that I found her charming in every respect, and proffering me hospitality without the slightest knowledge as to who I was. I understood at once that she was a superior person, and had silently resented the impudent attempts of her neighbours to probe her heart.

'You are very kind,' I answered; 'but the fact is, I am somewhat of a valetudinarian. I have overworked myself in Glasgow, and came down here for rest and change. My intrusion on your privacy cannot be excused——'

'Pray say no more,' she exclaimed with such heartiness that I was completely set at rest, and she extended her hand to me—a hand that was soft and white.

I was much struck by this spontaneous cordiality to an utter stranger, and, producing my card-case, I gave her my card, and mentioned the name of my doctor, on whose recommendation I had come down.

'Pray come in, pray come in!' she said, in her pleasant, persuasive way, as she glanced at my card.

I followed her through the dimly-lighted hall into the room at the window of which the canary still warbled. It was a dingy, musty apartment. The paper on the walls was greatly discoloured by age, while the carpet was so faded that it had become a dirty grey. Half a dozen lumbering mahogany chairs, a round table, a small, well-stocked bookcase, and a mirror over the mantelpiece, together with a massive marble clock and a few ornaments, constituted the whole of

the furniture. But I noted at one end of the room, hanging in the centre of the wall that faced the light, was a very massive picture frame, but I could not determine then as to what the frame contained, for it was partly screened by a black velvet curtain, which was only a little smaller than the frame itself. When I had taken a rapid survey of the room the strange occupant of the house motioned me to be seated.

'Although we are strangers,' she said, 'I am so glad you have come. It is years since I received a visitor, and when I saw one of my own sex in the garden I could not resist the temptation to break the monotony I have so long endured.'

'Surely, madam,' I began, feeling that I was being drawn towards this woman in an unaccountable way, 'it must have been a strange cause that induced you to immure yourself in such a way, for I may frankly state that I have heard in the village that you lead a hermit sort of life.'

'Yes,' she answered with a sigh, 'the cause is strange. But let me offer you some refreshment.'

In spite of my protests she rang the bell, and the old woman who had been described to me as 'waur than the mistress' appeared, and her mistress bade her put some luncheon on the table in another room. In a few minutes the luncheon was announced as ready, and during the time that we were partaking of it my hostess with tact and skill managed to learn a good deal about myself. I found her charming and irresistible, and by the time the meal was finished I really felt as if I could tell her anything, and that instead of having known her for a brief hour, I had known her for years. Luncheon finished, she invited me to return to the parlour.

We chatted away for some time, and she gradually grew more confidential, and on my remarking, 'Although I know nothing of your history, I venture to give expression to my sympathy, for I am sure that only some great sorrow could have driven one so accomplished as yourself into such exile as this,' she turned away for a few moments as if overcome

with emotion, which my words had aroused. Then she answered:

'You are right, it was a great sorrow; and one as unexpected as it was overwhelming. You see that frame'—pointing to the frame on the wall—'it contains a portrait. For years it has hung there as you see, but I have never dared to gaze upon it. Your visit here has awakened many bitter memories, and has served to accentuate my loneliness. It has produced in me a strange longing to break the spell by which I seem to be surrounded, and I crave for sympathy and comfort. You will think me strange and eccentric, no doubt, but if you knew my sorrow you would excuse me.'

'Indeed, I do excuse you as it is,' I said, endeavouring to express by my tone how truly sympathetic I was.

Women are quick to take to each other under such circumstances. Jealous of each other, and bitter and even cruel they can be, but once let them be drawn towards each other by heart sorrow and they can at once be all tenderness, all truth, all love. Men cannot understand this feeling, but women know how true it is.

Mrs. Slark came to the chair on which I was seated, and taking my hand she grasped it warmly, saying in trembling accents:

'This does me good. It breaks the ice, as it were. It thaws me. For the first time for many years I will once more gaze upon that portrait. Often in my solitude have I been tempted to do so before, but I felt that I dare not while alone.'

She advanced to the wall, drew back the dusty velvet, and disclosed the portrait of a gentleman. Time and neglect had laid their destroying hands on the picture, but the face was perfect. It was that of a man in the meridian of life; the forehead was massive, bespeaking intelligence, but the eyes were the largest and strangest eyes I ever saw. It seemed to me as if there was something weird and even supernatural in

them, and so faithfully had the artist done his work that, even after the long lapse of years, they seemed to glow from the canvas with a living light.

When Mrs. Slark drew the velvet she turned deadly pale, trembled violently, and fixed her gaze on the painting. When some minutes had passed, and seeing how violently agitated she was, I arose, and, going to her, I laid my hand on her shoulder, saying softly:

'You do not seem well. The portrait evidently affects you.'

She relinquished her hold of the velvet, which fell into its place again; then, as I led her to a seat, she burst into tears. I did not speak again for some moments. I knew it was better she should weep.

'Forgive my weakness,' she said at last, 'but the sight of that portrait has strangely affected me.'

'Dare I inquire the cause of a sorrow so great as yours?' I asked.

'Yes,' she answered, 'I feel that it would do me good to impart to another the secret I have so long pent up in my own breast. Ah, how terribly a man may blight a woman's life!' I assented to this with a sigh. 'The original of that portrait was my husband. It is now nearly thirty years since I was married to him. But he was not my first love: you know we women say that a woman never gets her first love, and no doubt it's true. He whose bride I hoped to become had been acquainted with me from my earliest girlhood. His name was Meredith—Walter Meredith. He was highly gifted; a poet of no mean order, and somewhat of a dreamer. One day when he came to see me he was much distressed. I asked him what had upset him, but he said I should laugh if he told me. I urged him, however, and he informed me that we should never become man and wife.

'"But why?" I exclaimed.

'"Well," he continued, somewhat reluctantly, "three times running I have dreamed a dream." In spite of my

promise I could not help laughing, and said banteringly, "Surely you are of sterner stuff than those who are affected by dreams." "I tell you, Lydia," he answered, "I have dreamed this dream three times running. I thought that I had a false friend, who outwardly had a smooth and honest face, but in my dream I was permitted to see another face beneath that one, and it was a bad, cruel, deceitful face, and wherever he went I saw burning above his head, like a halo, the word 'Death,' in letters of fire, and the end of this dream each night was that the strange man seized me in his powerful arms and hurled me into space; and down I sank, sank, plunging into horrid darkness, until, when the climax of agony was reached, I awoke with a start, and found myself bathed in perspiration." I laughed again as he finished, but he assured me that the dream had made a singular impression upon him, and it had begot in him a presentiment that he could not shake off.

'About six months after he had related this extraordinary dream to me, my only brother, who had been travelling in Italy, returned, bringing with him an Italian friend, who was visiting England for the first time. His name was Carlo Garcia, and he became our guest. It is useless for me to attempt to deny the fact, and equally useless to attempt to explain it, but fact it is that that man, Carlo Garcia, exercised an extraordinary fascination over me. He was highly educated, but withal a mystic, and he had done something more than dabble in those things which are supposed to be beyond the reach of our human intellect. He was a brilliant conversationalist, a pleasant companion, and there were few subjects that were beyond his grasp. He came to us for a few weeks, but he and my brother were soon so attached that his stay stretched into months. His charm of manner and conversation seemed to influence all with whom he came in contact, and, though I used to think Meredith was sometimes jealous of him, even he confessed to admiring him.

'Near the end of the fifth month of Garcia's stay with us,

and when the day for my wedding with Walter Meredith was drawing near, the terrible news came to us one morning that Walter's body, shattered almost out of recognition, had been found at the base of some tremendous chalk cliffs that rose up from the seashore near our residence.

'You see I speak calmly now, but that event threatened for some time not only my reason but my life. Over the cliffs a pathway ran, and this was a favourite walk of Walter's. In one part of the edge of the cliffs was a great notch, as though a piece had been scooped out with a huge gauge. The gap sloped at a steep angle for a dozen yards or so, then ended abruptly, and went down two hundred feet perpendicularly. It was at the foot of this place that Meredith's body was found lying on the hard shingle, which was reddened with his blood. Investigation proved beyond doubt that he slipped down the gap I have spoken of. But no investigation brought to light how he came to go down there. A month later Garcia returned to Italy, and I saw nothing of him again for a whole year, when unexpectedly he presented himself at our house, and within a very short time after he began to talk love to me. The old fascination he had once exercised over me revived, and, though I could not forget my dead love, I found myself falling under this strange man's influence, and, when one day he asked me to become his wife, I was not so much surprised as alarmed. I say alarmed, because somehow I could not shake off a vague feeling of dread that I entertained for him. I could not possibly have defined this dread, but I knew that it existed, and I was so ashamed of it, because my people were wrapped up in him, that I kept it to myself. He spoke to my father and mother and brother, and as they were in favour of the union, and as he vowed that he could never know a moment's happiness unless I became his, I consented. Then he kissed me for the first time, and never shall I forget to my dying day the extraordinary thrill contact with his lips produced in me. It was not a thrill of pleasure but pain, and that night, in the solitude of my own room, I asked myself

whether I really loved the man. I was conscious that he had exerted some strange power over me, and, though I was fascinated, I could not determine if I loved him.'

She paused here, and presently said:

'But perhaps my story is boring you?'

'On the contrary,' I exclaimed, 'I assure you I am deeply interested.'

'Well, I will be brief. We were married. My wedding-day, however, did not make me feel happy. My thoughts wandered back to the halcyon days, when I had given my heart to the man who then lay mouldering in his grave. I almost brought myself to believe that, by accepting the love of another, I was desecrating the dead man's memory. The marriage bells did not make music to my ears, but sounded harsh and inharmonious. And what struck me as being extraordinarily strange then was that my husband appeared melancholy. Outwardly he was all gaiety, but it was forced.

'We went on the Continent for our honeymoon, and the kindness and tenderness Carlo displayed entirely changed me, so that when we returned I felt that I loved him truly. But I noted with alarm that he was sinking into a state of morbid melancholy. He told me it was the effects of over-study—he was engaged in drawing a chart of the heavens, astronomy being a subject in which he was passionately interested. We returned home, and settled down in a charming little retreat near Edinburgh. My husband, however, gradually grew worse. His eyes assumed a wild, vacant stare, and his face became deathly pale, while white threads appeared in his black hair. He would walk the garden which surrounded the house in the wildest storm, his eyes ablaze, his arms beating the air. I grew terribly alarmed, and consulted a physician, but Carlo declined to see him. In the course of six months this young and handsome husband of mine had become a prematurely old man. His whole nature too had changed. He was irritable, fretful, and neglected me. I saw

clearly that something was affecting his mind, but, though I saw the effect, I was powerless to discover the cause. One evening when we were sitting together he suddenly sank on his knees with a wild cry of despair, and covering his face with his hands he exclaimed: "Spare me, spare me, for mercy's sake spare me!" I almost fainted with fright, but rushing to him I asked him what was the matter. He was bathed in perspiration, his eyes were wild, his face and lips blanched, and he had a dazed, stunned appearance. I helped him to a chair, and revived him with stimulants, but he could not or would not give me any reason for his strange attack.

'From that hour he seemed to grow more and more melancholy, and I had him closely watched, for I felt sure insanity was approaching. The *dénoûment* came at last. It was a Sunday evening. I had been to church, leaving Carlo at home, for he would not be persuaded to go with me. A sullen, gloomy day had culminated in a night of storm. A fierce gale drove in from the sea, bringing heavy squalls of rain with it. Our house was much exposed and very lonely, standing, as it did, by itself on an elevation, with lofty trees surrounding it. We kept a large watch-dog, and on this particular night he howled and whined in a manner altogether unusual. I, too, seemed to be the victim of some extraordinary nervousness, which was increased, or possibly engendered, by the howling of the dog, the screeching wind, the rustling of the trees, and the beating rain. I had already sent one of the servants to try and calm the dog, but her efforts had been fruitless, and, worked up at last to a state of unbearable irritation, I begged my husband to go out, unchain the poor brute, and bring him into the kitchen. Somewhat reluctantly he consented to do this, and threw a mackintosh over his shoulders. As he opened the door a furious gust of wind whirled a heap of leaves into the hall, and at the same moment there was a terrific crash, and something came thundering down close to the steps. Carlo rushed back into

the room, his face livid, his hair almost standing on end, and he sank helpless into a chair.

'I went into the hall to try and close the door, and I found that a pine-tree had been torn up by the roots, and hurled across the pathway. When I returned my husband was sitting in the same position. I tried to soothe him. I pressed his head to my bosom. I bathed his temples and spoke words of comfort. Suddenly he started up, and, pushing me away, exclaimed:

'"Lydia, do not touch me. You are an angel of mercy, but I am lost, lost! I have deceived you, but can do so no longer. My secret has tortured me with the torture of the damned. Your lover, Meredith, was slain by me. I pushed him over the cliff because I was jealous of him, and I wanted you for myself. Since then he has haunted me." He screamed out here and pointed to a long window that opened on to a lawn, and at which the curtains had not been drawn.

'Almost mechanically I turned to where he pointed, and whether it was that my imagination had been wrought up to a morbid condition by what I had gone through and the awful revelation I had just listened to I know not; but this I vow is true. In the blackness of the window I saw a shadowy form. Then my husband sank to the floor with a groan. "Will this torture never end?" he muttered.

'When I looked at the window again the figure had gone.

'There was an appalling silence in the room then—a silence broken only by the furious beating of my own heart, which I distinctly heard, and by the clock on the mantelpiece, the heavy ticking of which seemed to me like the sounds of an axe ringing on a steel plate. I was rooted to the spot, unable to move hand or limb. A spell seemed to have been set upon me. Oh! the horror of that moment! It was as if every second was an age. I found myself looking at my husband. His face was ghastly: his eyes were bent fixedly on the window. He was gasping for breath, and seemed to be choking, and I've a recollection that I tried to speak, but my

tongue refused utterance. I closed my eyes at last to shut out the horror of that man's face; then I experienced a sensation as if I was being whirled round and round with tremendous velocity. Once more I opened my eyes and looked at him. He had not moved. His face seemed to have become more ghastly. The blue veins stood out on his temples like cords. His eyes appeared to glow with absolute fire. I felt then that if the spell was not broken I should fall down dead. Suddenly a mist seemed to rise from the floor; all things faded from my sight, and there was a blank—I had swooned. How long I lay there I know not; but it must have been a long time, for when I awoke the eastern light was breaking. My hair was dishevelled, and the front of my dress was covered with clotted blood. I had evidently bled from the nostrils, and I suppose that had saved my life. Then the horror of all I had endured rushed through my brain. I feared to look round lest I should again see his awful face. I called him by his name. There was no answer. Then, with an all but superhuman effort, I turned to where I had last seen him. But he had gone, and I was alone.

'For many hours after I lay in a raging fever. Kind friends flitted round my bed and ministered to my wants, but he came not. I feared to ask the question that trembled on my lips—Where was he? At length my attendants seemed to come and go with a stealthier tread. I saw strangers in the room, and people spoke in mysterious whispers. I could bear the suspense no longer. "Where is my husband?" I cried. Each one turned to the other and seemed to be communicating by strange signals. "Tell me," I repeated, "where is my husband?"

'"You shall know soon," they answered.

'"I will know now," I shrieked, as, springing from the bed and breaking away from them, I rushed to his room, and saw him then—saw him dead and in his coffin.

'I had a serious relapse, and for a long time fluttered between life and death. But my time had not come, and

slowly I recovered. Then I learned that on the morning following that awful night he had been found at the bottom of the garden lying on his face, stark and dead, with the blue blood oozing from his mouth.

'As you may imagine, that place was fraught with too much that was painful for me to remain there, and for a long time I travelled about with my mother, until she died, and soon after I lost my only brother. The charm of life had now gone for me. The world could give no pleasure, and so at last I came here to bury myself in solitude, with an old and faithful servant, who will remain with me as long as I live; and, in order to lose my identity as far as possible, I assumed the name of a relative.'

I listened with absorbed interest to this remarkable story which was told with striking dramatic power. She was the better for having told me her history, for her solitude and the burden of her secret had become unbearable. From that hour a strong friendship sprang up between us, and it resulted in my going to live with her. The friendship was uninterrupted for half a dozen years. Then I nursed her in a brief illness, which terminated in her sudden death. She had willed her property to me, and the first thing I did was to utterly destroy the portrait of Carlo Garcia, for it filled me with a sense of horror. I had looked upon it once, and once only. That was on the morning when I first made the acquaintance of Mrs. Slark, but after I knew her story the veiled portrait became for me an object of dread, and I felt relieved when I knew it had been put out of existence.

XVIII

THE COMPACT

On December 24, 1840, four young men were, in their own way, enjoying themselves at the charming little inn known as Die Eisene Glocke (the Iron Bell), situated about two miles from Heidelberg, on the banks of the Neckar. This inn, which stood in extensive grounds, on a steep hillside, the hill at its base being washed by the river, and covered to its summit with a pine forest, was situated in one of the most notable beauty spots in that beautiful region. In summer time Die Eisene Glocke drove a roaring trade, for the salubrity of the air, the beauty of the surroundings, and the exquisite walks through the pine woods were a source of irresistible attraction, both for the Heidelbergers themselves and the strangers visiting the far-famed scholastic town. In winter, however, it might have closed its doors for all the trade it did. Not that the romance and beauty were less, but your German is not fond of stirring far from the warmth of his huge porcelain stove in the winter time, and the strangers at that season are few and far between. What, then, were these four young men doing there on that 24th of December, 1840? That question shall at once be answered. Firstly. the weather was magnificent; the air was crystalline; the sky an unclouded azure; the sun brilliant, but the temperature below freezing point; and the country all round whitened with snow. The four men were bachelors, with no relatives in Heidelberg, and being warm and fast friends they had

agreed to spend this day together, and had sent a message to mine host of Die Eisene Glocke, to whom they were well known, to prepare a sumptuous dinner for them. They had been working and studying hard, and were for the nonce going to have a day of thorough indolence, pure air and enjoyment, and there was no place they could have selected within the same distance that would have so thoroughly answered their purpose as this exquisitely situated little mountain inn. These four men were men of learning and science although young. One still lives, as I write this, and is celebrated throughout Europe; two died comparatively recently, having carved their names on the imperishable records of their country as workers in the vast fields of science. The fourth died young. One was Professor Fritz Oppenhiemer, of Bamberg, in Bavaria, Doctor of Moral Philosophy in the College of Heidelberg; another was Ludwig Demmer, of Munich, Professor of Chemistry in the same college, but who was leaving in three months to proceed to St. Petersburg to fulfil a similar position there; the third, Doctor Gustav Unger, of Mayence on the Rhine, Doctor of Medicine, who had but recently taken his degree, having been studying for several years in Heidelberg, and who was going shortly to Berlin; the fourth an Englishman, Walter Harold Croxford, of Bath. He was a B.A. of Oxford University, and at this time leading a kind of dilettante life, for having ample means he had not been driven by necessity to fix on a profession; but he had a great love for science in all its branches, and a passion for botany and geology. He had gone to Heidelberg nearly three years before to perfect himself in the German language and in these particular branches of study, and now he was on the eve of leaving to commence a tour round the world in order to prosecute his botanical and geological researches. And Gustav Unger was to start in a few days to take up his position as a junior physician in one of the hospitals in Berlin, a post to which he had recently been appointed.

Such then were the personages of the little party, and, as

already stated, being much attached to each other, they were spending this Christmas Eve together previous to separating, perhaps never to meet again. Being all in vigorous health, with perfect digestions, they enjoyed a sumptuous dinner, with a liberal supply of noted Rhine wines, and a couple of bottles of mine host's special reserve of champagne, which he kept solely for distinguished visitors. The landlord's name was Katzenstein; an honest, blunt, shrewd fellow, who had occupied the inn for over twenty years, and who was about as prosaic and sceptical a man as one could have met in a day's march. He had a habit of saying: 'I believe little but what I see, and not too much of that.' It is well to remember this in connection with what follows.

The four gentlemen having finished dining, and having dined like gentlemen, went on to the verandah which overhung the river, where they had chairs and a table placed, and cigars and black coffee brought. The verandah faced the west, and the slanting rays of the afternoon sun shining full on it made it warm and pleasant. The four friends were very merry; their laughter rose into the crisp air, and echoed from the rocky cliffs on the other side of the river.

Slowly the sun sank. The snow-clad fir-trees caught its glow, and the river rolled red, and redder it grew as the sun went down, and a warm flush lingered in the sky; but this changed to orange, and that in turn gave place to a cold green, until the trees looked ghastly in their snowy robes, and the river was ebony. The sharpness of the air increased, and at last Unger jumped to his feet and exclaimed:

'Come, gentlemen, let us go in. It is too cold here.'

For nearly half an hour they had been silent and thoughtful. The growing stillness, the fading lights, the ghostly landscape, possibly affected them a little, though they might have hesitated to confess that. And another thing that had made them thoughtful was a remark by Croxford: 'Well, comrades and friends of mine, I wonder if we four will ever all come together again on earth.'

It is well known how a remark of this kind, uttered under such circumstances, will produce an impression on the minds even of men of thought and learning; for there is nothing so certain in this world as the uncertainty of life, and when we say *au revoir* it often means *adieu*.

All the gentlemen rose, shook themselves, stretched their arms, then filed into the comfortably warmed room through the long open window.

'Hi! Katzenstein,' shouted the cheery Oppenhiemer, whose full-compassed voice was suggestive of a lion's roar, for it had in it some of that solidity, that depth, that great volume which distinguishes the king of beasts. 'Hi! Katzenstein, shut the window and draw the curtains.'

Obedient to the command, Katzenstein, who was massive as a bull, entered with a big pipe in his hand, and smoke still issuing from under his ponderous moustache. He closed the window, and was going to draw the curtains, when Croxford, who had an artist's instincts and something of an artist's talent, said quietly:

'Leave the curtains, Katzenstein. There are some beautiful colours still lingering in the sky. Besides, I should like to see the moon rise over that landscape.'

'Ja,' grunted Katzenstein, 'Herr Croxford is sentimental.'

At this they all laughed, and Ludwig Demmer said:

'Oh, we all know that, don't we, Croxford?'

'Well, it depends what you mean by sentimental,' returned Croxford, with the air of a man who was pondering over something.

'Well, you are given to dreaming a bit, old comrade. Eh?' said Unger, slapping his friend heartily on the back.

'Yes—a little.'

'And you've been dreaming within the last half hour?' put in Demmer.

'Yes.'

'Now, what have you been dreaming?' they all asked.

'I'll tell you. I've been wondering whether after death a man really can revisit those he loves.'

'Oh, oh! ah, ah!' roared the friends in unison, and when their roar died down, Katzenstein, who stood motionless as a statue, stolidly smoking his great pipe, said solemnly:

'Mein Herr, you will be the better for some of my punch.'

This was said so gravely, in a deep bass voice that seemed to roll upward from the landlord's ponderous Wellington boots, that the four gentlemen, who were all familiar with Katzenstein, laughed heartily, and Croxford exclaimed:

'Bravo! The punch idea is good. What say you?'

'Oh, punch by all means,' said everyone.

'And mind you, Katzenstein,' added Unger, 'your special brew. Let your liquors be the primest, and blended with the touch of the true artist, while your flavourings must suggest the hand of the heaven-born genius.'

'Ja, Herren,' grunted the landlord, 'I have made punch for the Kaiser, and I will make the same for you.'

He went off, leaving a great trail of smoke behind him. He was famed for his punch-making, and the guests knew that they might expect something good.

'Now. Croxford,' said Demmer, 'I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll thresh this subject of yours out, and while imbibing Katzenstein's spirits, we'll try and invoke spirits from the occult world. Eh? What do you say?'

'Good, bravo!' cried the others.

'We'll thresh the subject out,' Croxford observed; 'but neither the circumstances nor our mental condition are such as to be favourable to intercourse with those who have gone before.'

Demmer and Oppenhiemer laughed loudly as they proceeded to light up fresh cigars, but Unger, assuming an air of gravity, said:

'I say, old fellow, have you really any belief in Spiritualism?'

'Let me ask you another question, friend Unger, before I

answer that. Do you believe that men have a spiritual existence after they have done with this life?'

'Well—yes, I think I do.'

'Then I believe in Spiritualism,' returned Croxford; 'that is, I believe that the body dies, but *something* lives for ever. You can give that something any name you like. Now, if you admit so much, why not go still further and say that there are conceivable conditions when we of the flesh may be brought face to face, or better phraseology will be to say, brought in juxtaposition with those who have preceded us into the silent land? Swedenborg went a good deal further than that, and Dante was a visionary and saw spirits.'

Croxford's friends all laughed as he talked thus. They laughed heartily, for they were very merry, and they were too full of robust life just then to think seriously of anything, more especially of death and after.

Katzenstein now came in bearing a huge bowl of antique shape and make, such as might have been used by roystering knights of the mediæval ages, and from it rose a cloud of vapour like incense going up to the altar of Bacchus, and following him came his daughter, carrying on a wooden trencher some of those massive and quaint old crystal goblets such as one may sometimes see at the present day in Germany in out-of-the-way hostelries, where modern innovations have not been allowed to snap every link that binds us with the past. Mine host set the steaming bowl down on the table with grave deliberateness as became so important an operation; and he gave vent to a long drawn out 'ach!'—which, being interpreted, was a grunt of self-satisfaction in this case. The gentlemen took their seats, and mine host's fair daughter Gretchen placed a goblet before each. Then Katzenstein stirred the punch with the big silver ladle, and filled each glass with a flourish and the air of a true artist.

'There, Herren,' he said, 'that is fit for the Emperor himself.'

'Come, a goblet for yourself,' cried Unger in his cheery strain.

'Gretchen, another goblet,' said the landlord to his daughter, and bowing with the grace and politeness peculiar to the old German landlords. The goblet was brought and filled. Then all rose to their feet and clinked:

'Gesundheit—health; and to our next meeting.'

'Ah!' sighed each of the guests, as he smacked his lips, 'that's perfect.'

Katzenstein bowed at this testimony to his skill in the art of punch-brewing.

'Well, Katzenstein,' said Demmer, 'as you have no other guests to-night to attend to you must help us to dispose of the punch. Doctors don't usually take their own prescriptions, but in this case *you* must.'

Once more Katzenstein bowed.

'I am honoured,' he said. Then turning to his daughter: 'Gretchen, bringen Sie meine Pipe.'

The girl soon returned, bringing his great pipe, the stem of which was three feet long, and the china bowl had capacity for an ounce and a half of tobacco. She filled it, lit it, then retired. The gentlemen lit fresh cigars, and settled down to the discussion of the punch and Spiritualism.

'Now, Croxford, dear old friend,' cried Oppenhiemer, 'let us to the spirits again,' whereupon, amidst roars of laughter, Katzenstein filled each goblet to the brim with the steaming punch. 'Those were not the spirits to which I alluded,' said Oppenhiemer, when he had recovered his breath; 'I meant the spirits of the dead.'

'These spirits will do you more good,' answered the landlord with imperturbable gravity, as he blew forth a vast volume of smoke from his capacious mouth.

Of course there was more laughter, and when it had subsided Croxford said:

'Well, here's a subject for discussion. I maintain that there are conceivable conditions when the living man may see the spirit of a dead man.'

Katzenstein opened his big round eyes, but said nothing.

There was a silence of some moments' duration. Then Demmer spoke:

'Yes, if he has partaken of too much of that,' pointing to the punch-bowl.

All laughed but the landlord. He smoked in solemn silence, and every hair of his great moustache, which was like the eaves of a thatch, seemed to be giving forth a little stream of blue vapour.

'He might see devils then,' returned Croxford, 'but that is not what I mean. I mean spirits from the unseen and unknown world.'

'Bah!' muttered Unger. 'I don't believe any living man ever yet saw a spirit, excepting he was mad or drunk. Then, of course, he would only see it in imagination.'

'And he would have to be very mad or very drunk,' put in Katzenstein, smileless as a judge delivering sentence of death, and with slow and weighty utterance.

Laughter followed this, of course, and when it had subsided Croxford remarked:

'Laughter and jest are good, but there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of even in *our* philosophy. Let us be merry, for to-morrow we die, said the philosopher. Let *us* be merry, say I, for to-morrow or soon after we part to meet again—when?'

'Well, I'll answer that,' returned Unger; 'we are old and attached friends. We have known many happy nights and days together, and such friendship as ours is not to be lightly broken. We are all going to separate, it is true. I go to Berlin, Oppenhiemer stays here, Demmer goes to St. Petersburg, and you, dear old boy, go further than any of us, for you go round the world; but if you travel round a globe in a straight line you must come back in time to the point where you started from.'

'That's an erudite remark,' put in Demmer, with a merry twinkle of his eyes.

'It is,' continued Unger; 'but what I was going to say is this. The mind reverts naturally to that which has afforded it pleasure, and bodies that have an affinity gravitate towards each other. We have an affinity, and this spot is fraught with many agreeable associations. Let us agree, then, to meet here again this day three years, and vow that nothing shall stop us short of serious illness and death.'

'Agreed, agreed!' cried Demmer and Oppenhiemer together.

'What do you say?' asked Unger of Croxford, as he had not spoken.

'Yes, I agree too,' Croxford answered, 'but I go farther than you, and say that, should any of us be dead, then the dead shall come too.'

The others laughed at this, but the laughter lacked something of its heartiness, for Croxford spoke solemnly and earnestly, and perhaps the others were beginning to realise a little more that separation of warm friends could not but be fraught with sadness. Katzenstein neither laughed nor spoke. His face was stolid and immovable, but the smoke came out in streams from under his moustache as if fire was smouldering there.

'That's a compact,' cried out Oppenhiemer, with a little ironical laugh.

'A compact, a compact,' exclaimed Unger and Demmer.

'A compact,' said Croxford, rising to his feet. 'Let us pledge ourselves to meet again here this day three years, living or dead. Katzenstein, you are a witness to this.'

'Ja, mein Herr,' answered the landlord, as rising, he filled the goblets once more. Each man raised his glass above his head, laid his left hand on his heart and said:

'I pledge myself to come here this day three years if I am alive, and if I am dead I will come if I can. And now, here is to our next meeting, and in the meantime, health, happiness, and prosperity.'

The toast was drunk with fervour, and the glasses filled again to confirm it.

'Ach, Gott Herren, this is pleasant fooling!' Katzenstein remarked.

'Very pleasant,' replied Oppenhiemer with a glance at the punch-bowl. 'I think we shall want some more of it.'

The bowl was subsequently replenished, and the hour was late when the four friends took their way back to Heidelberg, Katzenstein, still smoking, giving each a hearty grip of the hand as he bade him 'Gute Nacht' at the door, and as a parting word, and in his rolling, gruff voice he said:

'Remember, Herren, you are to honour my house again in three years.'

'Yes,' they answered, 'living or dead.'

'Living or dead!' he echoed. 'But dead men would be profitless. They don't drink punch.'

The four laughed merrily at this, and uttered the last 'Gute Nacht.' The river seemed to repeat it with something like mournfulness, and 'Gute Nacht' reverberated amongst the pine-trees, which looked like ghosts in winding-sheets. Overhead the stars glittered in frosty magnificence, and save for the river that moaned there was a hush over the landscape like the hush of death, while the cold was intense; and, coming from the heated atmosphere of the room, the convivialists shuddered in spite of fur cloaks and wrappings.

'Ugh!' cried Croxford, as he shook himself. 'Somebody's walking over my grave.'

'It would be a funny thing, dear old fellow, if you should be the dead man at our next meeting,' Unger remarked. Then in a half angry tone he added: 'But a truce to this grim jesting. God keep you, dear boy.'

'Amen to that,' chimed in the others.

The subject was allowed to drop, and homeward they went. Four days later Croxford, with a tremor in his voice,

wished his friends farewell, and took his departure for England, preparatory to sailing for New York.

* * *

Three years have passed. It is once again Christmas Eve, and in that cheery room of Die Eisene Glocke three of the four friends have assembled. These three are Fritz Oppenhiemer, Ludwig Demmer, who had travelled from St. Petersburg specially to be present, and Gustav Unger, who had come from Berlin. Croxford is not present but he is expected. Katzenstein has not changed a bit, and has prepared a most excellent dinner, which has been partaken of by the three.

The day has been very different to what it was at their last meeting. An unusually high temperature has prevailed, and all day long rain has poured down, and a boisterous gale has tossed the pine-trees about in fury, while the river has growled and groaned like some huge beast in pain.

The spirits of the three men, too, seemed to have caught some of the gloom which characterised the weather. They had eaten their dinner almost in silence, and not even Katzenstein's prime vintages seemed capable of raising them to a mirthful mood.

'When do you say you last heard from Croxford?' asked Demmer, addressing Oppenhiemer.

'A little more than three months ago.'

'He was then in Constantinople, you say?'

'Yes. Here is his letter, you see,' and Oppenhiemer produced a letter from his pocket. 'He says:

'"I have not forgotten our compact, and shall certainly be with you on December 24. I am full of wonder at all I have seen, and am in robust health and the best of spirits. The prospect of meeting you again elates me. Till then *à Dieu*."'

'And you have heard nothing since then?' asked Unger.

'No, not a word.'

It was impossible for those three friends to dismiss from their minds a feeling that something was wrong with their

absent friend. He was one of the most punctilious of men, and very jealous of his honour when he had once pledged his word. But they did not give expression to this feeling. No one of them liked to be the first to utter what he feared.

The afternoon waned, and the night fell from the low blurred sky of ashen grey. With the gathering darkness the wind increased, but the rain ceased, and in the course of an hour or so the clouds broke up into rugged masses, and a young moon threw a weird, ghostly light over the landscape. Driven by the storm wind, the clouds hurried athwart the sky in fierce, eager haste, now shading the moon, now leaving it clear, while over the land strange fantastic shadows swept in constant flight.

At last Oppenhiemer summoned Katzenstein and bade him prepare the punch, and in due course the worthy landlord came in bearing the huge steaming bowl, and followed by Gretchen with the goblets.

'Of course you will join us,' said Demmer, and with a self-satisfied 'Ja, mein Herr,' Katzenstein took his seat at the table, and Gretchen filled his great pipe and lit it for him. Then he ladled the odoriferous liquor into the goblets until each was full to the brim, but for some minutes no one seemed inclined to taste. At length Oppenhiemer spoke. There was a mournfulness in his voice that he could not possibly conceal.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'you will remember that on the occasion of our last meeting, this day three years ago, we all agreed to assemble here to-day if alive.'

'Or dead,' put in Unger, with a sorry attempt at a laugh. The remark caused a smile of scepticism to spread itself over the broad, stolid features of Katzenstein, who uttered a deep bass 'ugh!' expressive of his contempt for such 'nonsense,' as he would have termed it.

'Or dead,' echoed Oppenhiemer. 'Now, gentlemen, we are all here but one, and that one we know to be so scrupu-

lously sensitive in regard to his engagements that his absence raises in my mind a fear that all is not well with him.'

'I am afraid so, too,' fell from the lips of the others. 'Well, now,' continued Oppenhiemer, 'I am perfectly sure that not one of us expects for a moment that we shall see Croxford's spirit. I hope we have far too much common sense to believe for a moment in the supernatural. If Croxford is dead, and his spirit is conscious of things done in the flesh, and it has the power, there is little doubt it will present itself to us to-night. But a person being dead has done for ever with the earth, and in spite of all the old women's tales you may depend upon it the released spirit never again revisits the pale glimpses of the moon, so we will dismiss that idea from our minds. But as we are in doubt about our dear friend's fate, I propose that we drink in silence the toast—*To our absent friend.* There is his empty chair, and if he can keep the compact let him come and occupy it.'

All smiled as this was said, but as far as Unger, Oppenhiemer, and Demmer were concerned there was a want of life in the smile. In Katzenstein's case the smile was a sort of sneer, as though it was contemptible to think of such things.

All rose to their feet, raised the goblets, and drank the toast, 'To our absent friend.' Then there was silence as the glasses were slowly drained; but in a few moments the silence was broken by a long-drawn sigh. A sigh may be terrible in the stillness of the night, or at such a moment as this, and it certainly had a startling effect on those who heard it. Then the glass fell from Unger's hand on to the table, and, clutching Demmer's arm, he exclaimed under his breath:

'My God, look there!'

He pointed to the vacant chair, vacant no longer, for in it sat a shadowy, ghostly form, and the form was that of Croxford. His face was deadly pale, and from a wound on his chest blood was streaming. The ponderous Katzenstein staggered, and let his pipe crash to the ground, for even he saw it. And then in solemn, awed tones, Oppenhiemer said:

'Our friend has kept his word, for he was too honourable to break it even in death.'

'You see it?' asked Demmer, hoarsely.

'Yes,' answered Oppenhiemer, who, recovering his presence of mind, filled the goblets again, and said, 'Gentlemen, let us drink now to our dead friend.'

The glasses were raised, and the liquor tasted, and the misty form in the chair bowed in turn to each, then vanished into the air, from whence it seemed to have evolved itself.

When the spell which had fallen on the little assembly had passed away, Oppenhiemer said:

'Gentlemen, have we been cheating ourselves into a belief, or have we absolutely seen a spirit?'

'Well, I can swear I saw Croxford's form in that chair,' said Unger.

'And I,'

'And I,'

Repeated Demmer and Oppenhiemer.

'And did you not see it?' asked Oppenhiemer of Katzenstein, who had not spoken.

The worthy landlord seemed like one dazed, and, after long reflection, he said in his gruff tones:

'Ja. I saw it. But, Ach Gott! I'm puzzled.'

Oppenhiemer procured pen, ink and paper, and writing out a circumstantial account of the incident, each one signed it. Three days later, with the full consciousness of the importance that would be attached to such a document emanating from men of their standing, they went before the Burgomaster, who was also Notary Public, and swore the following affidavit, which I have extracted from the archives of the town of Heidelberg:

AFFIDAVIT.

[*Translation.*] 19 Hoen Strasse, Heidelberg, Prussia.

The undersigned make solemn oath and say that on December 24, in the year 1840, they were assembled with one

Croxford, an Englishman, in Die Eisene Glocke, kept by one Jakob Katzenstein. That they agreed to meet there again that day three years, living or dead. On the 24th of the current month—that is to say, December of the year 1843—Oppenhiemer, Demmer, and Unger did so meet, and while they and the landlord—that is, Katzenstein—were drinking a toast to their absent friend Croxford, his spirit form appeared seated in the chair reserved for him, and blood was seen issuing from a wound in his breast. Each of the undersigned saw this form distinctly, and heard it sigh.

(Signed)

FRITZ OPPENHIEMER, Professor of Philosophy.

LUDWIG DEMMER, Professor of Chemistry and Natural Science, St. Petersburg.

DOCTOR GUSTAV UNGER, Doctor of Medicine, practising in Berlin.

JAKOB KATZENSTEIN, Landlord of Die Eisene Glocke.

Sworn before me in accordance with the law prescribed for the administration of oaths in Prussia.

KARL PETER STERNBERG, Burgomaster of Heidelberg and Notary Public.

In presence of

HEINRICH SCHMIDT, Clerk to the Burgomaster, Witness.

. . .

Three weeks after this affidavit had been made by men whose word could not be impugned, news was received in Heidelberg that Croxford had been assassinated in Malta. Returning from the Opera one night he was set upon by some ruffians with a view to robbery, but, as he offered resistance, being a powerful man, he was stabbed to the heart.

NOTE BY THE AUTHOR OF THE STORY.

Writing a short while ago to the venerable and renowned Professor Oppenhiemer, who has been compelled by age and

failing health to give up all work, to ask him to furnish me with the reason why he and his colleagues made the affidavit alluded to, he was courteous enough to give me the materials for the story, and in concluding his letter he said: 'After forty-six years my belief is unshaken that on the night of December 24, 1843, I actually saw the spirit of my dead friend. My friends Demmer, Unger, and Katzenstein, who was one of the most sceptical of men, also entertained the same belief up to the moment of their deaths.

XIX

THE BELL OF DOOM

Up to a few years ago, when it was accidentally burnt down and never rebuilt, the land being sold for other purposes, there stood a quaint and somewhat peculiarly constructed house near Lymington, on the borders of the New Forest. It was known as 'Solent View,' on account of the view it commanded of the Solent. Originally it must have been constructed at a remote period, and probably was a farmhouse, as part of it was timber, the front of this part being crossed by heavy black beams of oak. One of the owners, however, had in more recent times built a wing of white stone. It would have been difficult to have defined the precise order of architecture to which this wing belonged. But one thing that rendered it conspicuous was a square tower, not unlike an Italian campanile, and to complete the similitude this tower was provided with an iron bell. The reason for this bell being there, no one could exactly tell, though tradition had it that the builder, with philanthropic motives, had placed it there that it might be rung in foggy weather as a warning to ships in the Solent. But tradition went even further than this, and said that the bell always solemnly tolled by itself whenever any member of the family was about to die. Solent View was certainly desirable as a place of residence, for it was most charmingly situated. Its front windows, and especially the tower, commanded a panoramic view of the Solent and the Isle of Wight. And it was said that on a clear day, and when the sea was rough, anyone

standing on the summit of the tower could see the angry waves breaking in mountains of white foam against the Needles. The north side of the house, that is, the side furthest from the Solent, looked on to one of those exquisite glades peculiar to the New Forest. The grounds, of which there were about an acre and a half, were tastefully laid out, the northern side being an orchard.

Solent View, seen under almost any aspect, whether in the storms of winter or the golden light of summer, was a charming place, and it seemed difficult to associate it with anything but peace and contentment. But there was a dark page in its history, and for long the simple country people in the neighbourhood passed it with bated breath, and spoke of it with a shudder.

At the time the incidents occurred that I shall now relate, the house belonged to, and was in the occupation of, Mr. Oriel Farnell and his family. This gentleman, who was a widower, had spent thirty years of his life in India as an indigo planter, and, having made a fortune, he had returned to his native country to end his days in peace, as he hoped. His family consisted of two grown-up sons and a daughter, Lydia, who was about twenty-one years of age. Lydia, who had been born in India, was a most charming and amiable girl, and greatly beloved by her father. With the tastes of an old Sybarite, Mr. Farnell had created a luxurious home, and surrounded himself with every comfort. His household consisted of his own man-servant, an Irishman named Michael Carron, who had been in India with him, having formerly been a soldier. Mr. Farnell was very fond of this man, and the man was said to be much attached to his master. In addition there were a cook, four other female servants, a butler, a coachman and groom, and two gardeners. Mr. Farnell kept a good deal of company, for he was fond of society, and it was very seldom his house was altogether free from visitors.

I have already spoken of Lydia Farnell as being a charming girl. She was charming in its widest sense, for, in addition

to a most amiable and loving disposition, she was exceedingly good-looking, a capital horsewoman, an artist of no mean talent, and highly accomplished. There was no wonder, therefore, that she had many admirers in the neighbourhood. The young men round about vied with each other in paying her attention, but she showed not the slightest disposition to favour any one of them. Being his only daughter, Mr. Farnell was by no means anxious that she should marry, for he could not bear the idea of losing her. In fact, the thought that some day she might leave his home was the one thing that seemed to cause him any anxiety, and if ever he ventured to hint at this she would put her arms round his neck and say:

'You know papa, dear, I am never going to leave you. I intend to be an old maid.'

Then would he answer:

'No, darling, I don't want you to be an old maid. For one endowed as you are that seems unnatural, but I am selfish enough to want you to stay with me for a long time yet.'

It seemed as if his wishes in this respect were to be realised, for out of their many male acquaintances there was not one that she displayed the slightest partiality for.

It frequently happens that when a young lady is situated like this she meets the man she can love under the most unexpected circumstances, and this was to prove the case in the present instance.

Lydia's brothers were exceedingly fond of yachting, and they kept a seven-tonner moored in a little creek not far from the house, and were in the habit of going out in her in almost all weathers. They were expert sailors, but in addition to themselves they always had an old man-of-war's man with them, a naval pensioner who had been about forty years at sea. And it was said in the neighbourhood that the Farnells' 'Water Witch'—that was the name of their yacht—could go anywhere and do anything.

One autumn morning they went out for a sail in company with their sister. It was in the beginning of October, and

though there was a rawness in the air, and when they started a white mist on the water, with scarcely any wind, the mist gradually cleared away, the sun came out bright and warm, and a good south-east breeze sprang up, which was fair for either running down or coming up the Solent. Tempted by the fineness of the day, it was decided to run as far as the Needles. The wind presently freshened considerably, but as it still blew from the same quarter they bowled along merrily. By the time they were off Alum Bay the wind had increased to half a gale, but the 'Water Witch' was exceptionally well found in every respect, and well handled. At some distance ahead of them was another yacht, which they had been watching intently, owing to her eccentric movements, which arose from bad management.

Suddenly the man-of-war's man, who was at the helm of the 'Water Witch,' exclaimed:

'Blowed if she won't turn the turtle directly if they don't mind what they are a-doing of.'

He alluded, of course, to the strange yacht, and his remark was called forth by the lubberly manner in which the stranger had been allowed to fly round to the wind, and heel over to a dangerous angle, so that her sheathing right down to the keel on the weather side flashed in the sunlight.

'I think, Master George, we'll bear down on her, and see what they are about,' said the helmsman to one of the brothers who was standing by him.

'All right, Harry,' was the answer. So the 'Water Witch' was put almost before the wind, the other yacht being to leeward of them.

In the course of a few minutes they had come near enough to make out that painted on her stern was the name 'Rover.' Five minutes later a passing squall caught both yachts, when, to the horror of all on board the 'Water Witch,' the 'Rover' was seen to capsize, and men were observed struggling in the water. The Farnells at once cut away their life buoys, got ropes ready, and swung their dingey over; and when they were

near enough the life-buoys were thrown overboard, and two of the men who were struggling in the water clutched them. The other men had disappeared, and it was, alas! only too certain that they had disappeared for ever. The 'Water Witch' was brought up into the wind until all her sails were shaking. Then the dingey was lowered, and the two brothers gallantly jumped in, and went to the rescue of the drowning men. One was a young man about five-and-twenty, the other a youth of fourteen or fifteen. Only after great difficulty and at considerable personal risk did the Farnells succeed in rescuing them. They were then in such an extremely exhausted condition that they could not speak, and consequently could give no particulars of the disaster. No trace of any of the others who had been in the water was observed, so the brothers pulled to the yacht, and put the rescued men on board. Fortunately there was plenty of bedding on board the 'Water Witch,' together with brandy, and, as Lydia had been busy cooking some luncheon, there was hot water too, for attached to the little cooking stove in the galley was a boiler holding between three and four gallons.

A hurried consultation was held as to what was best to be done, and the first idea was to run into Alum Bay. But, doubtful of what accommodation they might get there, Lydia said:

'Let us get home as speedily as possible.'

The 'Water Witch,' therefore, was headed for home, and with tender solicitude the two brothers stripped off the wet clothes from the half-drowned men, swathed them in blankets, gave them hot brandy, and did other things necessary under the circumstances. For some time it seemed doubtful whether the youth would recover, and even the young man remained in an exceedingly exhausted condition, so that when the yacht reached her destination they had to be carried ashore and up to the house. Mr. Farnell, who was an exceedingly hospitable man, was much shocked when he heard of the disaster. He at once had the strangers put to bed, then despatched a

messenger on horseback to Lymington for the family doctor, who lost no time in attending. He gave the young Farnells great credit for what they had done, expressing a belief that, had they not applied the remedies they did, both the man and the boy would have died. He said it would not be safe for the boy to be removed for two or three days, but the young man would probably be well enough to go away the next day. This, however, proved not to be the case, for a recollection of the disaster so overwhelmed him that he became delirious. From papers and letters found in his pocket, the Farnells learned that his name was Hailsworth, and that he was connected with the London firm of Hailsworth & Co., in Leadenhall Street, and a telegraphic message was at once despatched to the firm, with the result that as soon after as possible an elderly gentleman arrived. This was Mr. Stephen Hailsworth, the young man's father, and by one of those strange coincidences that are constantly happening in real life, he proved to be an East India merchant, and knew Mr. Farnell very well by name. The young man who had come so near a watery grave was his only son, and the youth was his nephew.

Mr. Hailsworth, it need scarcely be said, was full of gratitude for what had been done, and stated that his son and nephew had been staying at Ventnor with two young friends, and it turned out that they had hired a yacht, and had started off for the Needles, the yacht being in charge of an old fisherman and his son, both of whom it appeared were under the influence of liquor, and to this fact was due the capsizing of the yacht. Both the boatmen were drowned as well as the other two young men.

It is not necessary to dwell further upon the details of this sad disaster. Very frequently in accidents of this kind, when they are looked at from a philosophical point of view, there seems to be an ordered destiny in them. In the present case it certainly seemed so, for young Harry Hailsworth, who owed his life to the Farnells, was fated to become the lover of Lydia. This did not come about at once, but the accident having

brought the two families together an intimacy sprang up, as it could hardly fail to do. Harry Hailsworth had sisters, and they invited Lydia to London, and in return they were invited to Solent View. Harry, if not handsome, had a good deal to recommend him to a woman's notice. At any rate, where Lydia had been indifferent to the sighs and pleading looks of many other young men, she fell under the sway of Harry Hailsworth. But it was not until the summer following the accident that anything definite occurred. Harry was a guest at Solent View, and one day while rambling in the New Forest with Lydia he declared his love for her, and drew from her a confession that she loved him.

That evening young Hailsworth spoke to Mr. Farnell, who received the communication somewhat coldly, and the next day Mr. Farnell had a conversation with his daughter, and he clearly showed that he had some prejudice against young Hailsworth. He could give no reason for this beyond saying that he did not think Harry would make her happy. Perhaps, had he analysed his feelings, the true reason would have been found to be his dislike to losing the society and companionship of his daughter. A little later, when he saw that his daughter's happiness was involved in this matter, he said he would see Mr. Hailsworth, sen., and talk to him ; and for that purpose he went up to London.

Mr. Hailsworth, who bore a high reputation for probity and honour, was candid enough to say that his son had been a little wild, and had been sent to a mercantile house in Spain in the hope that he would settle down. But he had got into trouble there with a lady, and was obliged to come home, though since then he had improved, and gave promise of turning out a good business man, and his father promised to set him up in business should he marry.

This information did not tend to remove the prejudice Mr. Farnell had taken against young Hailsworth, and, on his way home again, he resolved to put a stop at once to the courting. But when he saw how greatly attached Lydia was to her lover

he could not make up his mind to do this, and so he allowed the love-making to go on uninterruptedly for the next few days, and then, much to his relief, Hailsworth took his departure, having to return to London.

For some time previous to this, Mr. Farnell had been annoyed about another matter quite apart from his daughter's love-making. The cause of this annoyance he kept to himself, but it was evident that letters he was receiving were troubling him. Whom the letters were from, or what they were about, his family did not know then, and, though they asked, he declined to tell them. A fortnight later, he suddenly announced his intention one morning of going to London on some business, as he termed it, though he would not state what the business was, which was very unusual with him. His conduct was so out of the ordinary, and his withholding his affairs from his children so remarkable, that they were much concerned. Lydia wished to go to London with him, but he would not hear of it. In fact, for the first time within her recollection, when she said she would go, he displayed anger towards her. He had changed considerably lately, and from a jovial, genial man, he seemed to have become moody and despondent, and his children could not help a feeling of anxiety after he had started on his journey.

Two days later Harry Hailsworth came down to Solent View quite unexpectedly. He told Lydia that an irresistible desire to see her had come over him, and he was determined to see her at all hazards. Now, his coming during Mr. Farnell's absence was a mere accident, for he did not know that Mr. Farnell was away, and, conscious that it might lead to unpleasantness, he wished to cross that evening to the Isle of Wight. The young Farnells, however, would not hear of it, saying that they would put him up, and promising him some shooting the next day in the Forest. He appealed to Lydia to know what he was to do, and she said 'stay,' and so he stopped.

That evening, as these young people sat in the drawing-

room engaged in playing whist, they were suddenly startled by boom, boom, boom—three distinct, sonorous booms of the iron bell up in the tower. The booms did not follow in quick succession, but there was an interval of several seconds between each. It was, in fact, like the tolling of a passing bell. The brothers and sister looked at each other in amazement, perhaps even with some alarm, but Hailsworth took little or no notice. To him it had no meaning. It is possible he did not even know there was a bell in the tower. Without speaking, George, the eldest son, rose and rang the drawing-room bell, and when the maid appeared he asked:

'Who is that ringing the tower bell, do you know, Jane?'

The girl looked a little scared as she answered: 'No, sir, I don't know.'

George left the room in company with his brother, and they went down to the servants' hall, where they made inquiries, but everyone vowed that he or she had not rung the bell in the tower.

Who had then? That was the question. Consternation was visible on the faces of all the servants who had heard the superstition about the bell tolling before the death of a member of the family. No one could ring the bell from below, and no one could ring it at all without passing through the house.

While the younger Farnell went out in the grounds, George told the butler to follow him, and taking a light he went upstairs, then along a passage, at the end of which was a wooden door that gave entrance to the upper part of the tower. There was no communication between the upper and the lower part, the lower part being used as a storehouse. The key of this door was kept hanging on a nail in the wall, and it was hanging there now. George took it down, opened the door, and went up the flight of winding stairs that led to the top of the tower. The butler followed in some trepidation. He was evidently afraid. There was no one in the bell loft, and no sign of anyone having been there. The young man went down again, feeling considerably mystified.

During the absence of the brothers, Hailsworth naturally asked some questions about the bell, and his sweetheart told him the legend.

When the brothers returned to the room—the younger one had been round the grounds with the gardener and coachman—they deemed it better not to say anything to their sister, and the game of whist was resumed. The next morning the two brothers and Hailsworth started off for a day's shooting, and that afternoon, before they were back, Mr. Farnell came home. He seemed to be much cast down, and his face had a haggard, troubled look. His daughter entreated him to tell her what was the matter, but, for the second time in her life, he answered her roughly, and told her to ask no questions.

She was highly alarmed at his changed appearance and unusual manner; and, though she dreaded telling him now about Harry Hailsworth being down, she felt that it was her duty to do so. When he heard of it he flew into a passion, and said it must have been a planned thing. Later on, when the shooting party came back, Mr. Farnell addressed Hailsworth in passionate language. He accused him of deceit and something worse. He told him to leave the house and never come back any more; and he vowed that he would never sanction Lydia's marriage with him.

Hailsworth was dumfoundered at this extraordinary reception, and George and his brother seriously thought that their father was suffering from sudden aberration of intellect. As for poor Lydia, she was broken-hearted. Stung by the unjust treatment, and the harsh words that had been used to him, Hailsworth so far lost command of himself as to speak sharply in return. He resented the accusation of deceit. This seemed to arouse Mr. Farnell still more, and he applied a strong epithet to the young man, and accused him again of having taken advantage of his absence to come there.

The young Farnells and their sister were indignant that their visitor should be treated in such a way. But what could they do? They remonstrated with their father to no purpose,

and then they apologised to Hailsworth, who, of course, had no alternative but to go, and go at once.

His parting from Lydia was a painful one, because they did not know when they might meet again.

'You must think nothing of this, dear,' she said, as she clung to him with her arms round his neck. 'There is something the matter with papa. I have never seen him like this before, and I quite think his head has gone wrong.'

'Perhaps it is so, darling,' he answered; 'but unless he requests me to come you see how impossible it will be for me to visit you again.'

'Oh, Harry,' she cried in alarm, 'you are surely not going to give me up? You have taught me to love you, and I cannot part from you now.'

'No,' he answered, 'if you don't want to give me up, nothing shall part us.'

'Harry,' she said tearfully, 'you know that I do not want to give you up. I will be true to you for all time. You must not take what my father has said seriously. I really do not think he is responsible for what he said to-night. Something has gone wrong with him, and it must be something very dreadful to produce such a sudden and wonderful change. I am sure all will come right in the end.'

'Yes; but when?' asked Harry with a lover's impatience.

'I hope before very long,' she answered.

'Anyway, darling,' he said, 'you will write to me, will you not?'

'Yes.'

'And if I come down clandestinely you will meet me somewhere?'

She hesitated. The question troubled her. She had never in her life deceived her father, and so she had to choose between love and duty now, and the struggle was a severe one.

'I think, dearest,' she replied tenderly, 'that you must for a while be satisfied with my letters. I am quite hopeful I shall soon bring papa to my way of thinking.'

This answer did not satisfy Hailsworth. It was not calculated to satisfy any ardent young lover who was smarting from a sense of a wrong done him, and who firmly believed he had been badly treated.

'Oh, well, if you don't choose to see me,' he exclaimed a little sharply, though, of course, he did not mean it, 'I think the best thing we can do is to part for ever.'

She was wounded by this reply, and she answered, though equally, of course, she did not mean it: 'Very well, dear, if that is your wish, let it be so.'

He had spoken with warmth and anger. She spoke sorrowfully and lovingly.

The conversation had passed in the hall, and they were now interrupted by the sudden appearance of Mr. Farnell, who sternly ordered his daughter to bed, and said to Hailsworth:

'You are a scoundrel, to be making love to my child after you have been ordered to leave the house. Go at once, or I will have you turned out!'

'Yes, sir, I will go,' answered Hailsworth hotly, 'but you shall not insult me with impunity, and, depend upon it, you will regret this night's work.'

Lydia, who was on the stairs, heard this, and she went to her room almost in hysterics. The butler and a chambermaid also heard it, for they were passing at the time.

Hailsworth waited for no further reply. He had said his say and left the house. He walked to Lymington, where he engaged a bed at the hotel. But he could well have done without a bed, for he did not sleep during the whole night. He paced restlessly up and down. He was in a state of excitement. Sorrow at parting from Lydia and indignation at the way he had been treated mingled, and he was at a loss how to act. But as the morning dawned, and when he remembered how sharply he had spoken to Lydia, and that he had been forced to leave her before he could ask her forgiveness, he felt disposed not to go from the neighbourhood until he had seen her again.

Nearly the whole of the next day he lay in bed, and in the evening when darkness fell he went out. He returned to the hotel at eleven o'clock. The landlady happened to meet him in the passage, and she was struck by his white face and his agitated manner. He was not only deadly pale, but was evidently suffering from strong excitement.

'Whatever is the matter with you?' she asked. 'Are you ill?'

'Yes,' he faltered, 'but it's not serious. I will have a little hot brandy and water and go to bed.'

Hailsworth drank his brandy at one draught, and, taking the candle the landlady offered him, he went up to his bedroom.

And at the same time, and within about two hundred yards of his house, Mr. Farnell was lying on his back on the road dead. He had been killed by a bullet in the brain.

Mr. Farnell's body lay in the road for nearly two hours before it was discovered. It would not have been discovered then, but a gamekeeper passing along actually stumbled over it. The man was startled, and struck a match to see who it was who was lying there, and then he recognised Mr. Farnell, and rushed to the house to spread the alarm. Mr. Farnell's absence had not up to this time caused any feeling of uneasiness, for he had gone to visit a neighbour about a mile and a half away, and whenever he went there, which he did every Thursday night to have a rubber at whist, of which he was very fond, it was late before he came back. His sons and daughter had gone to bed, and so had most of the servants, but the butler was still up; he invariably sat up when his master was out.

He went to the door when the bell was rung, and, instead of seeing his master as he expected, he saw the gamekeeper, who was agitated and excited, and whose face was as white as a ghost's.

'Hullo! what's the matter?' exclaimed the butler.

'My God, something awful!' stammered the man huskily. 'The master's lying dead there in the road!'

The butler turned as pale as the gamekeeper now, and reeled with the sudden shock the abrupt announcement caused him.

'Dead!' he gasped.

'Ay, he's been shot.'

'Are you sure?'

'Sure! There's no mistake about it. I tumbled over his body.'

The butler seemed stunned, but he went to Michael Carron's room and knocked at the door. Michael opened it instantly, and strangely enough he was dressed.

'What's the matter?' he asked.

'Come with me,' gasped the butler. 'The master's been shot.'

Michael made no reply, but followed the butler downstairs. Then they put on their hats, took stout oaken sticks from the stick-rack, and went with the gamekeeper out into the darkness. It was an exceptionally dark night, and in their excitement they had forgotten a lantern, so Michael went back for one. Thus provided they walked rapidly along the road. The night wind moaned weirdly among the trees, and the hoarse murmur of the sea could be heard.

The men soon came to where the body was lying, and it needed no professional man to assure them that Mr. Farnell was stone dead. He was lying partly on his side, with one leg doubled up underneath him, one hand across his chest, and the other arm stretched at full length. The fingers of that hand were tightly clenched, and were full of dirt, indicating that after he had been shot he had struggled a little.

The butler was greatly affected, for he had been many years in Mr. Farnell's service. Still he had presence of mind enough to notice the exact position of the body, with the details I have mentioned. That done, he sent the gamekeeper off to Lymington for the doctor. Not that a doctor could be of any

service, but it seemed the proper thing to do. But before starting the gamekeeper said:

'I wonder who has done this?'

'There is only one man I know of likely to do it,' returned the butler, 'and that man is Harry Hailsworth, who has been courting Miss Lydia.'

'Good Heavens! you don't say so,' cried the gamekeeper.

'Yes, I do. He quarrelled with the master last night, and I heard him threaten him, and it's him that's done it as sure as we are here.'

'Then I had best tell the police,' the gamekeeper replied.

'Yes, certainly.'

The gamekeeper went off on his mission, and then Michael and the butler carried the body to the house, not without some difficulty. That done the butler went upstairs and aroused the sons. They were terribly shocked, as may be imagined, when they heard the news.

Between five and six the doctor and the inspector of police arrived. The former proceeded at once to an examination of the body, the latter to making such inquiries as were necessary in a case of this kind. The doctor reported that death had resulted from a gunshot wound in the head, and that death had ensued within half an hour of the wound being made. He succeeded in extracting the bullet. It was a round bullet, and had been fired from a smooth-bore gun.

The inquiries of the inspector of police led him irresistibly to the conclusion that suspicion pointed very strongly indeed to Harry Hailsworth as the culprit, and he hurried off to ascertain the whereabouts of that young man.

It was not until nearly nine o'clock in the morning that Lydia was informed by her younger brother of the father's death. She almost became frantic when she heard the news. Then she reminded her brother about the mysterious ringing of the bell in the tower the night before the murder. There was mystery there which neither he nor she attempted to explain.

The news of the murder soon spread, and caused immense excitement in the district, for Mr. Farnell was widely known and universally respected. Before the afternoon had come the arrest of Harry Hailsworth had been effected. He was arrested at the hotel in Lymington, and was in bed when the police went to the house. For the greater part of the night he had lain awake, and had only fallen asleep about eight o'clock.

To those behind the scenes it seemed as if there never had been a clearer case of circumstantial evidence. The prisoner had been ordered from the house by Mr. Farnell, and had been heard by the butler and a chambermaid to utter what was construed into a threat. The exact words as repeated by the butler, on whom they seemed to have made a deep impression, were, 'You shall not insult me with impunity, and, depend upon it, you will rue this night's work.' Then the landlady of the hotel where he stayed said that he was very excited when he first went there. He lay in bed nearly the whole of the next day, and went out as darkness fell. It was between eleven and twelve when he returned to the hotel. His landlady was struck then by his white face and agitation, and she asked him if he was ill. He answered that he was, but not seriously, and then he drank some brandy and water at a draught, and went upstairs.

These details as told by the landlady left little doubt in the minds of those who heard them that the prisoner had murdered Mr. Farnell, and the energies of the police were directed to discovering the gun from which the fatal bullet had been fired.

The news of her lover's arrest fell heavily indeed upon Lydia. It was a double blow beneath which she almost sank. And as she remembered his rough words to her at their last parting, and his apparent menace to her father, she could not help thinking that he was guilty, and yet it broke her heart to think so. The death of her father, and the arrest of her lover on a charge of being the murderer, so overwhelmed Lydia that

she became utterly prostrated, and in a few hours it was painfully evident she had lost her reason. It was therefore deemed advisable by her friends to remove her and place her under the care of some relatives in Southampton. All the circumstances of the case were so remarkable, and in some respects romantic, that it aroused unusual interest. Of course the mysterious tolling of the bell the night before the crime soon became known, for servants will gossip, and this served to add a new element of mystery to what was already mysterious enough, for to most people it really seemed as if that affair was utterly incapable of explanation. The superstition about the ringing of the bell just before the death of a member of the family was a faith with the simple country folk in the neighbourhood; and though they had had no evidence before that tended to confirm the belief, here at last was testimony that no one in his senses could deny.

The body of Mr. Farnell was duly committed to the grave, and on that once happy home fell the heavy shadows of a never-ending sorrow. Not for a long time had a crime excited such universal interest throughout the country as this had done. The position of the parties, the fact that the suspected person had been the lover of the daughter of the deceased man, and that she herself had become demented, as well as that mystery about the bell, invested the crime with a glamour of weirdness and romance that rendered it peculiarly conspicuous. The papers made capital out of it, and people journeyed from long distances simply to satisfy their morbid curiosity by gazing on the house, and staring up at the tower where hung the bell that was supposed to have been rung by ghostly hands.

After the funeral George and his brother felt that the place had become hateful to them, and they went to London as soon as they could get away, leaving the house in charge of the servants and the police. The preliminary inquiries before the magistrates elicited little or nothing that was new against the accused. His friends were distracted, and employed one of

the most eminent barristers in London to defend him. At first Hailsworth seemed so dazed by the charge brought against him as to be unable to comprehend what was passing. But he quickly recovered and then protested his innocence.

All the evidence the police were able to get together formed what would have been a chain strong enough to hang any man, had it not been that one and an important link was missing—that missing link was the gun. Could they have traced possession of the gun to the prisoner, the evidence would have been overwhelming, but they could not do so. It was proved that on the day of the murder the prisoner and the two young Farnells had been out shooting. Each carried a gun, but it was of a totally different calibre to that from which the bullet found in the dead man's brain had been fired. Then George Farnell swore that, when they returned from their shooting expedition, he took the guns himself and placed them in the gunroom—a small room where they kept their guns, fishing-tackle, sails, and other things of a like kind. This room was invariably kept locked, and only he and his brother had keys. Besides, there was not a gun in the house that would fit the bullet. Then again, no gun was missing, so that, assuming the possibility that the accused had used one of the guns belonging to the Farnells, he must have taken it back again, and that certainly seemed too ridiculous to be entertained by sensible men. He could not have bought a gun in Lymington without its being known. Where, then, did it come from? Mr. Farnell had certainly been shot. The bullet that killed him had certainly been fired from a gun, for experts swore that the pistol was not in existence that would take it, it was so large. It had, in fact, been fired from a very old-fashioned smooth-bore gun, of a calibre which was no longer made.

This imparted a new element of mystery to the case; and people asked: 'Where is the gun?' The woods, lanes, and ditches were searched for miles around, but without result; and the Solent was even dragged, but the gun was not forth-

coming, and the police were baffled. But, notwithstanding this missing link, the magistrates who held the inquiry returned a verdict of wilful murder against Harry Hailsworth, and he was duly committed for trial, which would take place at Southampton during the Assizes.

During all this dreadful time Lydia was in a condition of mind which prevented her knowing anything of what was happening. As is frequently, if not always, the case, where dementia results from sudden shock, her memory was an entire blank as to the past; and her friends said, sorrowfully, that, under the circumstances, it was a blessing that she had been so afflicted. The accused, who knew nothing of Lydia's condition, was in a state of prostration himself, but to everyone with whom he came in contact he vowed solemnly that he was innocent, while his poor father and mother and sisters declared that he was incapable of such a dastardly deed. Of course, this proved nothing. People charged with murder usually do declare themselves innocent, and their near relations will never bring themselves to believe in their guilt until confession places it beyond doubt. But in the present instance the unfortunate Hailsworths found numerous sympathisers, and many people believed as they did. It was such a terrible blow for a family situated as they were. Their high respectability, their social position, naturally made them objects of unusual interest, as well as of commiseration, in the awful misfortune that had overtaken them.

After the magisterial inquiry had closed, Mr. Hailsworth, who had been present, went to Solent View by request of the sons. They were all cast down, as may be imagined, but Mr. Hailsworth was almost distracted, and in a burst of grief he exclaimed:

'My God! my God! this dreadful affair will kill me. But willingly would I die now if I could be assured of my poor boy's innocence.' Then to George Farnell he said appealingly: 'George, what is your opinion? Do you believe my unhappy son is guilty of your father's death?'

George hesitated for some time. Then he made answer thus:

'I confess that I am puzzled. Sometimes I think he is, and at others I cannot bring myself to think so. Many circumstances point to him as my father's murderer, but there are others again that do not seem reconcilable with that conclusion.'

'Then, George,' said Hailsworth, solemnly and hoarsely, as if his emotion was choking him, 'if you have the shadow of a shade of doubt of Harry's guilt it is your duty in the sight of God and man to leave no stone unturned, either to prove him innocent or leave his guilt no longer a matter of doubt at any rate in your own mind.'

'But how am I to do that?' asked the young man, in great distress.

'How! Need you ask me? You must know more of your father's affairs than anyone else. You are in a position to form an opinion of his habits, and whether he was likely to have made an enemy or enemies who would resort to the dreadful expedient of slaying him, either from motives of revenge or something else we cannot determine. So much lies in your power, and if you neglect aught, if you fail in the least degree to do what you are bound to do, a curse will rest upon you and yours for all time.'

Mr. Hailsworth spoke in an impassioned way, and as a man might speak who was stricken with a sorrow that was almost beyond human endurance. His words, argument, and manner made a deep and abiding impression on George, and, pondering that night deeply on what had passed, he remembered how for some little time before his death his father had behaved strangely. He had received letters that had annoyed him, and it was so obvious to his children that he was grievously troubled that they pressed him for some statement, but he had told them nothing. Then his strange journey to London, and his changed manner, his anxious and haggard face, all pointed to a trouble of some kind that he was anxious to conceal.

Here, then, thought the young man, was a mystery that it *was* his bounden duty to try and solve. After all, it perhaps had no bearing on the murder, but, on the other hand, it might have; and those two words 'might have' were a mandate to George Farnell that he dare not ignore, lest that curse of which Mr. Hailsworth spoke should come upon him and his. That night, in the solemn hours, as he lay there pondering, his resolution was taken.

Up to this point the late Mr. Farnell's papers had remained untouched, for the dreadful business had so overwhelmed everybody, especially the sons, that they could do nothing. By the will in the hands of the family lawyer, he (the lawyer) and the two sons were appointed executors. The day following his resolution, therefore, George despatched an urgent message to the lawyer, a venerable and highly-respected gentleman, who valued honour before self-interest. And when he arrived he and the young man proceeded to go through Mr. Farnell's papers.

To men who are not altogether without sentiment there is no more melancholy duty than that of going through the papers of a deceased friend or relative. They are the written records of schemes, hopes, joys, sorrows; of all the alternating experiences of life. But he who called them forth lies cold in the grave. The busy brain will think no more; the eyes that read are blind for ever; the hand that wrote is in the dust. But then there is something even deeper still—a dead man's papers are a dead man's secrets, for there are things that a man keeps even from his nearest and dearest friend, but about which he may have some written record. And so, when he is dead, and those who come after him have to rummage among his dusty documents, his folded letters—many of them, it may be, yellow and time-stained—they cannot help feeling that they are opening the dead man's heart, as it were, and reading the secrets written there, and which only death could bring to light.

Through the whole of that day George and the lawyer

kept at their task, and when the night was falling they came across four or five letters tied together with a morsel of twine, and carefully stowed away in a secret drawer in a large, old-fashioned escritoire. That is, secret so long as the owner was living, but was secret no longer now that he had gone down into the dust. And those letters were read with astonishment, and with a sense that a fearful revelation was being made. These letters seemed then in that first reading destined to clear up the mystery which surrounded the crime. Long and earnestly did the two men discuss what they had brought to light, and then they decided on a plan which led the lawyer to start off by the first train the following morning for London. Then, guided by what the letters revealed, he drove to a house in the quiet and genteel neighbourhood of Balham, and inquired for Mrs. Ella Raintree. An old woman, who seemed to be housekeeper and general servant, informed the lawyer that Mrs. Ella Raintree was seriously ill in bed, and could not be seen. But he would take no denial. He insisted on seeing her, and after some difficulty succeeded in being admitted into the lady's chamber, the pressing nature of the business upon which he had come rendering it impossible that he could observe the formalities and ceremonies of ordinary occasions. Mrs. Ella Raintree was in bed. That she was desperately ill was obvious to the most unpractised eye. In age she was perhaps a little more than thirty, and at one time must have been remarkably good-looking, but now she was emaciated, *blasé*, young though she was, with unmistakable evidence in her face of dissipation. The lawyer introduced himself, and when he did that Mrs. Ella Raintree seemed to be seized with some great fear.

For two long hours he sat with her, and when he left he felt that he had cut a Gordian knot, or, at any rate, unravelled a very tangled skein. He got back late that night to Solent View, and, late as it was, he remained closeted with George Farnell for two hours before they retired. The following morning he was up early, and rode into Lymington, and soon

after he arrived there, three constables in plain clothes set off for Solent View, and this indicated that some fresh development of the strange drama was about to take place. When they reached their destination they found all in the place in a state of excitement, for another tragedy had taken place. In a loft over the stable Michael Carron was lying dead. He had died by his own hand. He had placed the muzzle of a loaded pistol in his mouth, and, pulling the trigger, had shattered his head. Was this another mystery? Well, it might have been, but was not, Carron, in giving up his life, doing an act of justice. He put into writing a confession that it was his hand that slew Mr. Farnell, and he did more than this—he gave a detailed statement as to why he had done so dreadful a deed; and he said that the old gun with which he had shot his master he had kept by him for years for that very purpose, if ever he got confirmation of suspicions he had long entertained. After the murder, he carried the gun some five miles or so, and hid it in a hollow oak tree, and he clearly indicated the spot. He also stated that it was he who had tolled the bell which had announced Mr. Farnell's doom, but it also announced his own doom.

'The evil that men do lives after them,' and the reason for Carron's crime may be briefly told. This reason was disclosed in those letters which the lawyer and George discovered in the secret drawer of the escritoire. Then it was confirmed and amplified by the lawyer's interview with Mrs. Ella Raintree, who told him all that he wished to know; and it was doubly confirmed by the desperate suicide of Carron, who, suspecting —and suspecting correctly—that the lawyer had solved the mystery, and was going to London to see the woman, took his punishment in his own hand, preferring a suicide's end to that at the hands of the executioner. But he stated in his letter of confession that he had resolved to confess before Harry Hailsworth was brought up for trial.

The story, as told by Carron and confirmed by the lawyer, was sad and terrible, and sullied the honour of Mr. Farnell.

Twelve years before this a young woman had come to Solent View as lady's maid to Mrs. Farnell, who was then living. She bore the unromantic name of Fanny Smith. She was a conspicuously pretty girl, and Michael Carron, in the process of time, fell desperately in love with her, and she apparently returned his love, and it was agreed that they should be married later on. Then Mrs. Farnell died, and pretty Fanny Smith's services were retained for Lydia, who was a young girl. Soon after this Carron began to feel jealous of his master, though he could never get any reliable evidence to justify that jealousy. The year following Mrs. Farnell's death, Fanny suddenly disappeared. Carron believed that her disappearance was due to his master, who had robbed him of his intended bride, but he could get no proof, though he swore an oath on the Bible that if ever he did get proof, no matter how long after it might be, he would shoot his master.

Act the second of this little domestic drama reveals Fanny installed in London, where she was occasionally, and with great caution, repeatedly visited by Mr. Farnell. She became a mother, but when her child was two years old it died. Then Fanny's nature seemed to change. She slid down the hill rapidly, and for many years Mr. Farnell lost sight of her. What her life was during those years need not be told here. Suddenly she came to the surface again, and wrote to Farnell demanding all sorts of things. She wrote several letters, and at last he went to see her, when she demanded an extravagantly large sum of money, and threatened to expose him if he did not give it. He refused, and in a moment of pique, and knowing nothing of Carron's oath, she wrote to him, telling him all. Then the fulfilment of the oath followed, and when Fanny, then under the assumed name of Mrs. Ella Raintree, heard of Mr. Farnell's death, and knowing that she had brought it about, she became prostrated with illness from which she was destined never to recover, for her constitution was shattered. When these facts all came out at the trial of young Hailsworth, he was, of course, acquitted, but the terrible

ordeal through which he had passed had so told upon him that his own friends scarcely knew him. Crushed in spirit and broken-hearted about Lydia, he went to Australia. Six years later Lydia Farnell recovered her reason as suddenly as she had lost it. The fact was announced to Hailsworth by George Farnell himself, for they had kept up a constant correspondence, and Hailsworth, who had been true to his love, returned, and shortly after he and Lydia were wedded.

'As gold must be tried in the fire, so the heart must be tried by pain.'

Their hearts had surely been tried by pain, but the reward had come at last.

Soon after the winding-up of Mr. Farnell's affairs, Solent View, to which George succeeded, was put into the market, but the evil reputation it had acquired so depreciated its value that the owner resolved to keep it until time had purged it. But some years later, owing to the carelessness of an old man and woman who lived in it as caretakers, it was reduced to ashes, and though it was fully insured, George Farnell refused to rebuild it, and sold the land.

XX

THE STORY OF A HANGED MAN

My name is Phelim Connor. By parentage I am Irish, but I was born on August 2, 1820, at or near a little town called Troy, in the State of Pennsylvania, America. My parents, who were highly respectable, kept a store in that place; and being naturalised Americans, and as I passed thirty years of my life in the States, never having been out of the country from the day of my birth until I was a little past thirty, I suppose I have a right to call myself an American. On January 8, 1849, I was put upon my trial for murder. The trial took place at Philadelphia. It lasted four days, and, although I was very ably defended, a verdict of guilty was returned against me, and I was sentenced to death. For a whole year I languished in prison, for in America there are so many legal quibbles that a prisoner under sentence of death can avail himself of, that he may postpone the carrying out of his sentence for a considerable time, even if he does not succeed in setting it aside altogether. In my case every artifice that the cunning of the legal mind could suggest was resorted to, but without avail, and at last the warrant for my death arrived. Thereupon the scaffold was erected, and on February 4, 1850, I was taken from my cell to the exterior of the prison walls, and in the presence of an enormous concourse of spectators I was duly hanged. I am aware that this is a startling statement, and will be received with incredulity; but

read what follows, and I will give you such facts and figures that you will no longer doubt. Moreover, the story I have to tell is so strange and startling, and withal so true, that it would be hard to find a parallel to it.

I was tried before the Hon. Aaron Osgood, one of the Supreme Judges of the Criminal Courts in the State of Pennsylvania, and the well known author of 'American Criminal Law, which is the standard work in America at the present day. He is also the author of the more widely-known 'American State Criminal Trials,' which is likewise a standard book of reference. The leading lawyer for the prosecution was Salim Isaac Shimer, Esq., Public Prosecutor for the State; and his juniors were Mark Phelps, now a Judge of the New York Bench, and Henry Walford Lane, subsequently of the State Criminal Procedure Offices at Washington, but since dead. My defending counsel was the Hon. Washington Cleveland, admitted to be one of the most powerful pleaders in America, and he was assisted by Gifford Jefferson, Esq., who has since become famous by his great work, 'American Laws, and the Men who Founded Them. Anyone who is at all acquainted with America will know that the trial in which I was the chief actor must have been of no ordinary kind to have brought together such a galaxy of legal talent as is represented by the names I have mentioned. The incidents that led up to the trial had kept the whole country in a state of excitement for months; and the trial itself was one of the most sensational on record. During those four memorable days the business of the town almost came to a standstill, and all day long both inside and out of the Courthouse military guards were posted to keep the excited crowds in order. When the verdict became known so high did partisan feeling run that a riot broke out, and was not suppressed until blood had been shed. There was a very large following indeed in my favour, and, considering that I had been unjustly condemned, they allowed their feelings to get the better of their discretion, with the result I have stated. During the twelve months

that I lay in prison my friends were very active, and they left no stone unturned to try and save me from the hangman; but the Government declining to interfere the law was allowed to take its course. On the morning of my execution, notwithstanding that a heavy snowstorm was raging, and the cold was intense, something like twenty thousand people had assembled to witness the last act of legal vengeance. Troops had been drafted into the town to preserve order, and the police and warders of the gaol were strengthened by a large addition to their number. The fellow who acted as executioner was a notorious rascal, whose real name was Silas Bronner, but who was known as 'Chowder Sam.' How he came to be so called I don't know. I believe he had been condemned to life imprisonment for murder, but had been released on condition of his undertaking to execute criminals when called upon to do so. I shall have more to say about him presently.

With these preliminary remarks I will now tell the story of the strange events that led up to my condemnation and execution. I have already said that my parents were highly-respectable people. They were both natives of the county of Cork. My father was employed as a clerk in a Cork bank; and my mother was the daughter of a farmer at Inishannon, a little village about ten miles to the south of Cork city. She was remarkable for her beauty, being of the true southern Irish type, which, as is well known, approximates to the classical Spanish type. She had a mass of blue-black hair, eyes of sloes, and a pink coral complexion, with a figure that left nothing to be desired. My father was a good-looking, well-proportioned man, and the two met through my mother visiting at the house of some friends in Cork. It was a case of love almost at first sight, and in spite of much opposition on the part of her relatives she married my father six months later. A year after that a girl was born and died. Then my parents emigrated to America, and after some little wandering about they finally settled down at Troy, where I was born. I had two sisters of whom I shall speak by-and-by. One of

these sisters was destined to play a prominent part in the great tragedy in which I was the leading actor.

My parents, having succeeded to a little money through the death of a near relative, opened a general store in Troy, and did so well that they were enabled to give their children a good education. I was intended for a doctor, and, having spent some years at school, I was sent to Boston to study for the medical profession. And now let me refer again to my sisters. The eldest, Mary, was as sweet and gentle a creature as ever the good God put life into. She had all her mother's beauty, with something of it heightened. She could shake her hair out until it touched the ground, and enveloped her like a veil. She had a magnificent head delicately poised on a swan-like neck. I do not mean to say that she had actually a neck like a swan, but the expression as a figure of speech suggests its perfectness. She had dark, languid eyes, with long silken lashes, and a complexion that one could scarcely overpraise. Allied to this physical beauty was a sweet, trusting nature that won every person with whom she came in contact. Well and accurately indeed might I describe my dear sister in the words of the poet :

> Dark her hair as the winter night,
> White her neck as the Alpine snow,
> Red her cheek as the morning light,
> Bright her glance as the artless roe.

My second sister, Norah, took more after my father. She hadn't the same wealth of hair, nor the same brilliancy of complexion, as Mary. But had Mary not overshadowed her so, Norah would have been pronounced an exceedingly pretty girl. Nor was she quite so gentle and patient as her sister, but she was a dear little woman—quick, impulsive, warm-hearted, generous to a fault, somewhat self-willed but withal very lovable. And I doted on them both. We were a very united family, and at one time a happier one could not have been found in the United States.

These two girls were well brought up for people in our station of life, and they were fitted and qualified to take a good position in the world. Between Mary and me there was a difference in age of five years, and between Mary and Norah two years, so that I was seven years Norah's senior.

When I went to Boston to pursue my studies I was a man. I had been what is usually termed 'a little wild.' But whatever follies could be laid to my charge, they were the follies of boyhood only. I went to Boston full of noble resolve and high purpose. I talked of distinguishing myself, and of writing my name on the annals of fame. My intentions were good. They were the outcome of youthful enthusiasm, and my aspirations were ennobling. There was one weakness, however, in my composition. I lacked that one essential to steady progress—dogged perseverance. I was somewhat of a romantic turn of mind, and could not reconcile myself to anything that partook of a humdrum existence. I had, in fact, an excitable and enthusiastic temperament; that temperament that enables soldiers, sailors, explorers, and pioneers in all works of adventure, to distinguish themselves in trying moments, and perform great deeds. I had a passion for books of travel and adventure. The wonder is, therefore, that I was content to remain stationary as long as I did. But our destinies work themselves out with clockwork regularity and mathematical precision, although sometimes it is difficult to believe that that is the case; though any man who will carefully examine the details of his life will be surprised to find that each act, no matter how trivial, and each deed, has been but a link fitting into a perfect chain, and that no link could be taken away without destroying the harmony of the whole. This is a truism that may astonish many, but its soundness cannot be gainsaid.

Notwithstanding the restlessness that always seemed working within me I spent over three years in Boston, and made good progress with my studies. In fact, I may state that I succeeded to some extent in distinguishing myself, for I was

possessed of an individuality that would not allow me to be content to remain a mere mechanical nonenity—a human sheep, as it were, that baaed with the flock. That was a position that would not have satisfied my longings or my restlessness.

I made many acquaintances and numerous friends in Boston; but there was only one with whom I became really intimate. The one was Defrid Zadwaski. By nationality he was a Pole, but he had been in the States the greater part of his life. He occupied the important position of professor of languages in the college. In age he was only a few years older than I was. His disposition and temperament approximated pretty closely to my own in one or two respects. He was restless, for instance, and always seemed to be yearning to constantly change the surroundings of his life. He was ambitious and capable of enthusiasm; but there the parallel ceases; in other respects he was my antithesis. He was a dreamer for the most part. He was a mystic. His philosophy was tinged with scepticism and morbidness, and he held extraordinary views with regard to the relations of the sexes one to the other. He argued that woman, neither as an actual fact, nor as a potentiality, was, nor could she become, man's equal; that being his inferior both mentally and physically, she was, theoretically at least, man's servant, and that it was her duty to administer to his wants, his pleasures; to afford him gratification and to anticipate his wishes. That when she ceased to do any of these things, she could, and should, be put away, as any other hired servant might.

Now, although this peculiar doctrine was to me heresy as compared with my own way of thought on the subject, I conceived an unaccountable liking for the man. That he was clever goes without saying, for only a clever man is capable of such distinct individuality as he displayed. But it was not exactly in his cleverness, and certainly not in his physical attributes, that his attractiveness lay; for he was somewhat under the medium height, with a sallow complexion and a

rather shrunken figure. It was in a peculiar fascination of manner. Of course, it will be argued from this that only weaker-minded men could fall under his sway, and that consequently I was weak-minded. I am not prepared to admit that that is altogether correct, but it is no part of my purpose to enter into any critical argument on the subject here. Defrid Zadwaski fascinated me as he fascinated hundreds of others. Moreover, the liking seemed to be mutual. He averred that I charmed him, and that there was an originality about me that he liked. The result was we became close companions. It was not until about the year after we had become really intimate that I took him down one vacation to my home.

It may seem singular, and I will confess that it was singular, that I, the brother of two young women, who were conspicuous for their beauty, and no less for their loving and confiding dispositions, should have brought them under the influence of a man who held such remarkable views as to woman's position. But how often do we do things in life which do not strike us as being *outre* until after—perhaps long after—they are done? He spent a fortnight at our house on that occasion, and before returning to Boston I asked my sisters what they thought of Zadwaski. Norah answered impulsively, 'I don't like him'; but Mary more guardedly, and with an obvious reserve, said, 'He's a little peculiar, but still he is not objectionable.'

'Did he tell you,' I said laughingly, 'that his idea of woman is that she should be an absolute slave to man?'

'No,' she answered quickly, and changing colour—this change of colour being due to indignation, for Mary had a high opinion of her sex, and her idea was that woman was man's equal in every respect.

'Oh, well, you know, Mary,' I returned, 'men in their youth often say things that are not worth serious consideration. Zadwaski is not a bad fellow, and he is clever.'

'Yes,' she answered in a strangely thoughtful manner, 'he is clever.'

Six months later I took Zadwaski down home again, and that time he was three weeks with us. We were, as it seemed, perhaps literally so, a happy party, though the most perfect happiness is at times only but a thin veneer, as it were, that hides unending sorrow. Nature ofttimes weaves the beautiful and the deadly, the attractive and the revolting together. In the most beautiful of tropical forests, where the eye is ravished by grandeur and sublimity, the deadly serpent lurks, and life and death go linked together. When Zadwaski and I were on our way back, I observed that he seemed much more contemplative than usual. He was frequently given to fits of abstraction, but somehow, now, he appeared to be altogether unusually absorbed.

'What is sinking into your ponderous brain now, Defrid?' I asked, with a laugh.

He started like one who starts suddenly from a dozing condition on being shaken, and he answered me ambiguously, apparently, though his answer was the key-note to the solution of his mood:

'I've been thinking that my views in regard to woman require modifying.'

'Oh!' I exclaimed in surprise.

'Yes.'

'Since when did you begin to change your doctrine?'

'Since I met your sister Mary.'

'Indeed,' I answered, a little seriously, as a new light dawned upon me, 'am I to understand from that, my friend, that you have fallen in love with Mary?'

He did not answer my question immediately. He pondered upon it before he spoke.

'You may understand this much. Mary has exercised an influence over me such as no other woman has ever done before.' He paused again before asking this question, as a correlative to his remark: 'Are you glad or sorry to hear that?'

'I cannot say at the present moment, but I am either the

one or the other,' I replied. 'Perhaps I ought to have guessed that something of this kind was all but inevitable, if you and my sister became acquainted. That may be a compliment for you both. But my happiness is so bound up in the happiness of my sisters, that I should like to be sure—very sure—that, before giving my approval of any engagements, the men who sought them for wives were beyond all question of doubt calculated to enhance their happiness, to respect them as wives, to honour them as women.'

I saw by the expression of his face that my remark displeased him. There was a point in it, as I intended there should be, and it pricked him a little. He thought, no doubt, that it implied doubt of him.

'Well, let us drop the subject for the present,' he said; and so we did not discuss it again.

For many days after that, however, I was troubled about this matter, and at length I wrote a long letter to Mary asking her to tell me candidly what her feelings were for Zadwaski. Her answer was brief and displeased me. This was about the substance of it: 'You ask me a question that at present I am unable to answer. I am not even sure of my own feelings; and, moreover, dear brother, I am not disposed to make you my confessor, at all events until there is something more definite to confess.'

Mary in writing thus could have had no possible intention of paining me, but she did pain me, nevertheless. Some days later Zadwaski approached me and said:

'Pray, my dear fellow, do not attach any importance to what I said the other day. I was under the impression then that I had a growing love for your sister. I have examined my heart since and find I am mistaken. I shall always regard her with great respect, but I shall carefully avoid seeing her again.'

I confess to a feeling of some relief as he told me this, for much as I had been charmed with the man, when it came to the possibility of his marrying my sister I viewed him in a

different light. After this we resumed our old relations, and Mary's name was never mentioned. But I was struck by one thing. Zadwaski seemed to change. He went about like a man who had something preying on his mind, and I was under the impression he shunned me somewhat. The result was there was a gradual and almost imperceptible breaking off of that close intimacy that had existed, until at last, without any rupture of any kind, or any explanation, we seemed by mutual consent to avoid each other.

A few months after this change had come about, it chanced that I was standing in the hall of the college when the morning mail was delivered. I was very anxious to receive letters, as I had had none from home for several days, and the last one had spoken of my mother being slightly indisposed. I therefore eagerly examined the bundle of letters to see what there was for me, and in doing so I came across one addressed to Zadwaski, and the handwriting was that of my sister Mary. My heart leapt into my mouth, for this letter pointed to a secret correspondence, and my distrust of the Pole had become a very real thing now. I said nothing to Zadwaski. I knew too much of him to suppose that he would give me any information. But as soon as I could get away I went down home, and told Mary what my suspicions were. At first she prevaricated, but at last admitted that she had been carrying on a correspondence. I was hurt and distressed, for I saw that the fascination this man had exercised over her must indeed have been great when it could lead her to deceive, or even to attempt to deceive, her only brother. I went back to Boston full of determination, and feeling as if a crisis in my fate had arrived. I sought an interview with Zadwaski, and accused him of treachery and deceit. He refused to plead guilty to the accusation, and said he should resolutely decline to consult me as to the course he should pursue in regard to my sister. This defiance and impudence irritated me beyond control, and forgetting myself I struck him a severe blow. He did not attempt to return it, but he at once brought my

conduct under the notice of the authorities, and I was called upon to make a public apology. This I declined to do, and I was told that expulsion would follow if I did not. But I did not wait for them to expel me. I went that very night, and, smarting from a sense of unmerited injury, and of a wrong done me by my sister whom I had worshipped, I turned my face westward to those lonely regions where danger and excitement might make a man forget almost that he had lived before.

For over two years I wandered about those western wilds, and threw myself heart and soul into the adventurous existence peculiar to them. I might fill a big volume with all I went through during that period. I literally carried my life in my hands, but the very excitement begotten by this sort of thing pleased me, and I became oblivious to almost everything else. Then one day an old newspaper came into my hands, and amongst the obituary notices I read of the death of my mother. If an Indian's arrow had suddenly quivered through my body, I could not have experienced a keener pang, or a more sickening sense of faintness, than I did when I read that announcement. Oh, how I reproached myself for my long silence, and for the way I had left my home! Home-sickness came strong upon me at that moment, and I hurried to my native place, to find what? Not the peaceful, happy home I had left, but a desolation, a wreck. My father prematurely aged and well-nigh distracted, my mother dead, and my sisters gone.

'Where are Norah and Mary?' I asked of my father in a choking voice, and feeling as if my heart was literally swelling up and going to burst.

I knew something dreadful had happened. It was written in his face, which was wrinkled and haggard. His eyes were sunken, his hair white. My question caused some colour to come into his pale cheeks, and fire into his dimmed eyes.

'I don't know,' he said, as he ground his teeth and clenched his hands.

'What?' I gasped, like one who was suffocating.

'I don't know,' he repeated with greater emphasis, and speaking like a man who was swayed by some mighty passion, which he only kept in check by a still mightier effort.

I looked at him; his eyes met mine, and in his gaze I read much. Then before I could recover myself and speak he broke into sobs, and with a reproach in his tone exclaimed:

'Oh, Phelim, why did you leave us as you did? Ours was a happy home before you went away. Now look at it. Your dear mother lies in her grave. And your sisters——' That look of passion came back into his face, and his eyes blazed. 'I feel inclined sometimes to curse them,' he added, hissing the words out, as it were, fiercely.

'Hush,' I said, 'curse not, but tell me all.'

'Mary went first,' he began, but as he spoke something came up in his throat and seemed to choke him. He made an effort to control himself, then added, 'And Norah followed her.'

The terrible truth flashed upon me now like an inspiration, and I said with unnatural calmness, 'And Defrid Zadwaski is responsible for Mary's going away?'

'How do you know?' asked my father passionately.

'I guess it,' I returned.

'Yes. He took her away.' As my father said this, he was a study of concentrated and yet controlled passion, but had Zadwaski stood there at that moment it would have been his last. It was terrible to see my father now—gentle, generous, and confiding as he had always been—so utterly changed, to see the fierce passion that was shaking him, and the craving for revenge that blazed forth from his eyes. But the tigress robbed of her young is doubly dangerous, and had not my father been robbed of his daughters, upon whom he had doted?

When he grew calmer he told me the whole pitiable story. After I went away Zadwaski renewed his visits to our house, until my father took a strong dislike to him, and forbade him to come again. He returned no more, but kept up a secret correspondence with Mary, who suddenly left her home. The

shock of her going away in this manner was awful; it shattered my mother's health, and almost deprived my father of reason. But, notwithstanding that, Norah disappeared soon after. This last blow crushed my mother into her grave, and turned my father into a lonely, broken-hearted old man, whose one prayer, one thought, one hope was—Revenge!

I listened to this terrible story without sign, without motion, without any outward expression of the passion that was almost tearing me into pieces. But that strange calm which precedes the bursting of the tropical typhoon is not more surely indicative of the coming storm than was that unnatural calm which possessed me as my honoured father told me of my sisters' shame, and of Zadwaski's perfidy. At such a time as this a man—or, at any rate, most men, and I was one of them—looks not beyond his human sphere, nor turns his eyes to that mystical hereafter, when, as we are taught, man's wickedness to man shall be divinely judged and divinely punished. He who has no craving for revenge in such an hour of humiliation and shame must have something of the divine element in him. Judged by this, then, I had no such element in me, for in my brain there seemed to ring a voice that cried ceaselessly, 'Revenge! revenge!'

On the table in the room in which my father had told me the story of shame was the large old family Bible, from which my beloved mother was in the habit of daily reading to us when we were children. I placed my right hand on the sacred book, and standing erect I raised my left arm at full length with the index finger pointing to heaven, and still, outwardly calm, and with wonderful self-possession I spoke, and this is what I said. I can repeat the sentence word for word with unerring accuracy, for every word burned itself into my brain:

'Father, here in your presence, with my hand on this Bible, and in the sight of Heaven, I swear to search the earth, if necessary, to find Defrid Zadwaski, and, when I have found him, to kill him.'

A cry of fierce joy broke from my father's trembling lips, and, tottering to me, he threw his arms round my neck and embraced me, saying the while:

'Now, indeed, are you my son. While the destroyer of your sisters lives the earth groans from the presence of a foul monster. Slay him, and every honest man in the world to whom honour is more precious than life will bless you.'

'And now tell me,' I said, 'know you where Zadwaski is?'

'No.'

'Then from north to south, from east to west, will I wander until I have found him,' I answered. An hour later I started on my quest, and I went direct to Boston in order to try and get a clue to the man I was now sworn to hunt down and kill. The return to the scenes of my happy college days affected me deeply, as many golden memories were recalled. But my heart softened not, my purpose never wavered; the voice in my brain still rang out 'Revenge! revenge!' I learned in Boston that the last known of Zadwaski was that he was resident in New York as a teacher of languages: that night I was on my way to New York. I had no difficulty in finding Zadwaski's address, as it was in the directory. I accordingly made my way to 104th Street, at the top of the 5th Avenue, and near Central Park. But, on arriving there, it was only to find that he whom I sought had gone away six months before, without leaving any address. He had occupied rooms in a flat, and the proprietor of this flat was a man. To him I addressed myself, asking many particulars of his erstwhile lodger, and from the landlord's lips I learned the following particulars, which I give in his own words: 'He had two ladies with him when he came here. One he represented as his wife, and the other as his wife's sister. But I found out afterwards that one was just as much his wife as the other. In short, he was not married to either, but he treated them both, poor things, as if they had been his slaves.'

There is a common expression—'my blood boils'—used to convey some indication of unutterable indignation and anger

at wrong or insult done to one. It is a figure of speech, of course, but there are times when outrage to one's feelings is so great that it literally seems as if the blood bubbled up in the veins. Such a feeling as this did I experience as I listened to the landlord's words. And yet outwardly I was calm, but mentally I repeated the oath I had taken in my father's house, and the dumb voice in my brain cried with accentuated emphasis, 'Revenge!' But all the story was not yet told; and dreaming not that I was the brother sworn to avenge the wrongs done to his sisters, by shedding the blood of the wretch who had destroyed them, the landlord gave me a sequel.

'The younger of the two ladies—Norah she was called—seemed always to be in a state of great despondency, and she suffered greatly from hysterical outbursts. In that state she used to curse Zadwaski, and call constantly for Phelim. Who Phelim was or is I don't know, for the three of them were very reticent, and never spoke of their connections.

'Phelim,' I answered quietly, 'is the name of Norah's brother, and should he and Zadwaski ever meet, Zadwaski's life will not be worth a minute's purchase.'

'Ah!' exclaimed the landlord, in a gratified way, 'he deserves killing, for two more charming girls I never knew, and yet he treated them shamefully. Poor Norah got so bad at last that she was removed to the Fifth Ward Lunatic Asylum.'

This statement caused me for the first time to betray my feelings. It was as if he had struck me a violent blow, causing me to stagger. He looked somewhat surprised, and asked:

'Are you any relation?'

'Yes,' said I, 'her brother Phelim.'

'Good God! exclaimed the landlord, 'is it possible!'

I was calm again as I answered, 'Yes, I am her brother, and I have sworn on the Bible to kill Zadwaski.'

The landlord grasped my hand and wrung it. He was much moved.

'The villain deserves it,' he said; 'but the taking of life, even the life of one who has wronged you, is by the law of our country murder, and the punishment for murder is an ignominious death.'

I smiled contemptuously, but I know that I had the landlord's sympathy, for he wrung my hand again. Then we parted, and I at once made my way to the Fifth Ward Lunatic Asylum. I was told that Norah Connor—the name she was known by there—was a hopeless lunatic; that her mind was quite shattered. Not without great difficulty did I obtain permission to see her. How can I describe my feelings as I was ushered into her presence, and saw before me a haggard, pale, old-young woman? The eyes vacant and staring, the face puckered with an imbecile grin; the head clean shaven and covered with a closely-fitting skull-cap. All day long, I was told, she paced up and down the room to which she was confined, muttering to herself, and occasionally crying out 'Phelim, Phelim, Phelim.' If ever man's heart bled, as the saying is, mine did. Her mind was such a blank that she utterly failed to recognise me, and as I went away I said to myself, 'May Heaven trebly curse me if I let Zadwaski live!'

I ascertained at the asylum that for a short time after Norah had been taken there, a lady, her sister, called occasionally to see her. But these visits ceased, though for a little while a sum of money was sent regularly to enable Norah to be supplied with extra comforts. But the remittances suddenly stopped also.

'From what part of the country did the remittances come?' I asked.

'From Philadelphia,' was the answer.

Four hours later I was on my way to Philadelphia. On arrival there I immediately consulted a directory, but searched in vain for Zadwaski's name. There was an agency, however, for teachers of languages in the town, and thither I went as a sort of forlorn hope. But fate served me, and I found that the agency had the villain's name on their books. He was

staying in Philadelphia, and his address was given to me. At last, then, I had run him to earth, and his hours were numbered. But I did not rush off there and then to slay him. Such impulse would not have accorded with my temperament. I must kill this man slowly and deliberately, so that in his dying moments there should be compressed some of the agony that he had inflicted on me and mine. My first step was to ascertain something of his habits, and if my sister Mary was with him. I soon found out that she was not. She was elsewhere. That elsewhere was an obscure grave, marked only with a number, in the cemetery. That number corresponded with a number in the books of the cemetery, and against the number was written, 'Mary Connor, native of the United States. Date of birth unknown. Supposed to be between twenty-five and thirty years of age at time of death. Class of grave H2, in Roman Catholic portion of cemetery.'

This class of grave, as I was informed, was the very poorest class, and in that part of the cemetery no stones were allowed to be placed over the dead. Here were gathered the waifs and strays; the unknown dead; the suicides, and the like; and in this spot lay the remains of my once beautiful sister.

To that humble grave I went in the gloaming of the sombre October day. In the low, blurred sky was no gleam of light; from the trees the withered leaves were falling, and over those nameless mounds the wind wailed and sobbed. Kneeling down, I renewed my oath, and then, falling across the grave, I wept tears of phosphorus, or some other scalding matter, for I had no ordinary tears to shed. And in that supreme moment of agony my heart broke in twain. I arose and turned away. The night had come, even as the night of my life had come. The world was naught to me now. It contained only two persons as far as I was concerned. The one myself, the other Zadwaski, and when I had killed him I should be a lonely man in a lonely world.

This man lodged in a respectable house. He occupied two rooms, and his habit was to go every evening to a well-known

saloon, where he sat playing chess—a game of which he was inordinately fond—until a late hour. To that saloon I repaired, and then, for the first time since I last saw him in Boston, I gazed upon his accursed features, and a fierce, mad joy filled me. He had altered greatly. There were traces of dissipation on his face, and a restless, pained expression in the eyes that looked like remorse. Was it remorse? Could such a monster, who had wrecked a happy home and destroyed two dear women, feel remorse? No. I was wrong; it was not remorse: it was fear. For three long hours I sat in a corner and watched him; and I thrilled with a sense of exquisite joy that at last my quest was ended, and that never again would I lose sight of him until his black and rotten heart had ceased to beat. Midnight struck from the town clock, and a few minutes later he rose to go. I rose too. He was in the shadow of death, but he did not know it then. He shook hands with his companions, and he laughed, but it was not the laugh of a man who was happy. Then he lit a cigar and went out into the dark night, and towards his grave. Rain was falling. A bitter wind was sweeping through the deserted streets, and pulling his coat about his throat, and battering his hat down upon his head, he hurried along. And I followed noiselessly, as if my feet had been shod in wool. Up the many flights of steps that led to his lodgings he went, and I was within a few yards of him. He opened the door of his house with a latch-key. I had by a subterfuge previously provided myself with a key, and ten minutes after he had entered I softly opened the door, closing it as softly after me. Then I crept to his room. He had thrown off his coat, wrapped himself in a rug, and was finishing his cigar. As I entered I turned the key in the door, and the noise caused him to glance round, and, seeing a stranger in his apartment, he sprang up and exclaimed:

'What is the meaning of this? Who are you?'

'I am Phelim Connor,' I answered slowly and solemnly.

He staggered back. His face turned ashen. The half-

burnt cigar fell from his blanched lips, and a look of mortal fear came into his eyes.

'What do you want here?' he gasped out hoarsely.

'I have come to kill you,' I answered.

A look of unutterable, absolutely indescribable, terror swept over his ghastly face. He cast a nervous glance at the door of his bedroom, but between it and him I stood. No doubt in his room he had some weapon, but he could only reach it over my dead body, and in my hand, which was firm as a rock, I held a revolver.

'You wouldn't kill me in cold blood,' he whined. I laughed a mocking laugh of derision.

'You wrecked my home in cold blood,' I hissed. 'You sent my mother to her grave in cold blood. You drove one of my sisters mad in cold blood, and in cold blood you broke the heart of the other, and cast her body into a pauper's grave. A man, when he sees a snake crawling at his feet, crushes it in cold blood. To my mind you are infinitely more loathsome and more horrible than the most deadly of reptiles, and I shall slay you in cold blood, as you call it. That is, I shall kill you without the slightest compunction.'

'God pity me!' he moaned.

'No,' I replied, 'God will not pity you. You are accursed even of Heaven.'

In the madness of his despair he seized a chair, to hurl at me, but, with never a nerve of my body quivering, I fired, purposely striking him in the shoulder, just below the neck. He reeled and fell against the table; and the sight of his blood pouring out filled me with savage delight.

'Pity!' he gurgled.

'Yes,' I returned, 'the pity you accorded to my dear sisters.' Again I fired, shattering his right arm, and he sank to the floor with a groan. He was not dead, not even insensible, but I had a conviction that his life was fast ebbing away, and so I did not fire again, but kneeling down I put my lips to his ear, and hissed:

'I curse you, Defrid Zadwaski! Die with all your heavy sins upon your soul.'

By this time the household was aroused. There were the shrill screams of women, the cries of men, who were thundering at the door. I turned the key, and, flinging the door open, confronted the clamouring and affrighted people.

'There lies a human reptile,' I said; 'and I have in cold blood, and deliberately out of malice aforethought, killed him. Here is my weapon, and all I ask is that you will let me witness his dying agony.'

My revolver was taken, and I was seized by men, but I wrenched myself free, and stepped back to where Zadwaski was lying. He turned his dying eyes upon me. Then I saw them glaze. I heard a gurgle in his throat, saw his breast flutter, and knew then that he was dead.

I confronted the people and said: 'My revenge is satisfied, as far as it can be on earth. And now you can do as you like with me.'

There is no purpose to serve in dwelling upon all the details of my arrest; my lodgment in prison; the weary waiting for the trial; and the trial itself to which I have alluded. At first a public cry of rage went up against me. Zadwaski was supposed to have been highly respectable. He was spoken of as 'a quiet, inoffensive gentleman,' and the Press said my crime, if crime it was, 'was deliberate, brutal, and fiendish.' Gradually, however, some of the particulars of the story of shame and wrong began to leak out, and it was found that the saint-like Pole had been a devil in disguise. My friends, and I am happy to say I had many, took my case up very warmly, and one of the most ardent defenders of my act of vengeance was Dr. Silas King. This gentleman was for some years on the surgical staff of the New York Infirmary, but had been settled in Troy for a long time, and had been our family doctor. He knew my dear sisters intimately, and had once asked Mary to become his wife. He was a widower with two children, and, as there was considerable disparity of

age between him and Mary, my people opposed the marriage, although they much admired Dr. King. He said that if he did not get Mary he would never marry again, and he kept his word. Now, when he learned the dreadful fate of my sisters, he threw himself heart and soul into my defence. He was an eloquent speaker, and a good writer, and he both wrote and spoke in my defence, sparing no time, trouble, or expense. He gave Zadwaski's history to the world, and showed what a black-hearted villain he was, and how shamefully he had treated my sisters, driving one to madness and the other to an untimely grave. But Zadwaski also had powerful friends amongst his compatriots, and so there were two strong parties formed.

I have already spoken of the great array of legal talent that was gathered on both sides during my trial; but, in spite of all that was done for me, the verdict was adverse, and I was sentenced to die. The verdict was received with great disfavour by my supporters, and, losing control of themselves, they came into collision with Zadwaski's partisans, and there was much fighting and bloodshed.

When my poor old father heard of the verdict he was seized with a fit of apoplexy, from which it was thought he could not rally. He did, however, subsequently recover, but he was a wreck, physically and mentally. During the terrible year following my trial and the execution of my sentence, Dr. King never once relaxed his exertions. I had no fear of death myself. I had no clinging to life; but I did shrink from the ignominy and shame of a public execution. When at last it was found that all the appeals that had been made in my favour were rejected, and the law was to take its course, Dr. King visited me. He was burning with rage and indignation, and he told me that he would save my life yet, and he proposed a plan to that end. During subsequent interviews he unfolded this plan to me, and by means of considerable bribes of money which my father found, for he was well off, Dr. King secured the co-operation of two of the warders, the sub-governor of the

prison, and of Chowder Sam, the executioner, who would have sold his own mother for a few dollars. Without Chowder Sam's assistance Dr. King's daring scheme could not have been carried out.

In virtue of a solemn oath I took to Dr. King never to reveal the precise means he resorted to in order that I might be saved from the effect of the hangman's rope, I cannot disclose his plan. The object he aimed at was to prevent suffocation, and a singularly ingenious arrangement was adopted by the executioner, acting under Dr. King's instructions, whereby too great pressure on the neck was prevented.

I must mention that execution at this time in the United States was by sheer strangulation, not by a drop, and therefore Dr. King's plan was calculated to produce the desired effect. Had the drop been in force the plan would have been useless.

On the morning of my execution the weather was in my favour, for it was snowing heavily, and though it did not prevent the people from assembling in enormous numbers, it did prevent them seeing the scaffold clearly, and Chowder Sam was enabled to do his part of the work without attracting attention. All being ready I was strung up, and though the pressure of the rope was but slight it was sufficient to produce insensibility. At first I suffered pain. Then there stole upon me a delightful sense of dreamy languor, and all that had been most joyous and beautiful in my life passed before me as in a vision; and then I saw my sister Mary, her dear face wearing a smile of ineffable sweetness, and her shoulders invested with great white pinions. After that came a blank, and what followed I subsequently learned from Dr. King.

As soon as I was cut down he claimed my body, and had brought a shell, secretly ventilated. Into this my body was put, and then Dr. King had the coffin placed on a vehicle he had provided, and with all speed he conveyed my supposed corpse to his house. There he at once began means to bring about my resuscitation, and in the course of half an

hour his efforts were successful. For some time after recovering consciousness I suffered much pain ; I could not bear the light in my eyes; and I seemed so morbidly sensitive to sound that the slightest noise almost drove me mad. In the course of a few days, however, these symptoms wore off, and I gradually returned to my normal condition. Then I was secretly conveyed to Canada, where, in a little while, my father joined me, and I remained there until his death, four years later, and after that I came to England, where I have resided ever since. I am a lonely old man now. My dear friend, Dr. King, and poor Norah have long been dead, and many another who made my wrecked life worth clinging to has likewise passed away, so that the world is to me now a blank. The end cannot be far off, and I am impatient for its coming. Death, whenever he comes, will come to me as a friend.

It has been said that we make our own fate. He who reads this startling, but true, record can form his own opinion whether I made mine, or it was thrust upon me.

XXI

THE CRIME OF THE RUE AUBER

ENTHUSIASTS have spoken of Paris as one of the most beautiful cities of the world. The Parisians themselves go farther than this, and say it is *the* most beautiful city. The Parisians may be forgiven for their pride, for if we confine ourselves to the Paris of the Boulevards it is beautiful. But there is another Paris which the ordinary traveller does not see. It is a Paris of hideousness, of squalor, of all that is hateful and revolting in human nature. This gay capital, in fact, is a city of the most extraordinary and striking contrasts. And there is another aspect, too, which the observant writer cannot overlook; it is the city of original crimes. It has been reserved for Paris to exhibit human nature in such hideous and cruel forms, that one shudders and bows his head in shame and sorrow as he thinks of it. Of course, other cities have their plague spots and human fiends, but it is to Paris the world looks for novelty in the way of crime. But perhaps one of the most mysterious and novel crimes that even Paris has placed upon the records is that which has come to be known as 'The Crime of the Rue Auber.'

The Rue Auber, let it be understood, is not one of the slums of the city. It is not situated in the plague spots of Clichy and St. Ouen. It has no connection with the notorious St. Denis or Belleville, and it is far removed from Ménilmontant. Nor is it part of the Bohemian Quartier Latin. No, it is a thoroughfare of almost frigid respectability, lying just to the

west of the Grand Opera, and forming part of a line of connection between the Boulevard des Italiens and the magnificent Boulevard Haussmann which runs north. The houses in the Rue Auber are marked by a monotonous regularity of architecture. They are all large apartment houses and rise to a height of five storeys, each storey or flat representing two households. At No. 13 in this street — according to superstitious people thirteen is always an unlucky number—and on the third *étage* or flat lived Monsieur Henri Didet and his wife, together with one servant, Eugenia Suchard, a woman about fifty years of age. Didet was a young man, a little over thirty, and he was remarkable for his handsome appearance. He was the average height for a Frenchman, with a grace of carriage and perfection of figure. He had a mass of dark hair that fell over his white forehead in a wealth of tiny ringlets. His face was clean shaven, except for his dainty moustache, which was always scrupulously trimmed. His peculiarly mobile face seemed capable of almost any change, and his eyes, which were dark and piercing, appeared to possess the faculty of looking right through you. In disposition he was insincere, incapable of anything like serious thought, and he abandoned himself to the whirl and gaiety of Parisian life. It might be said that he passed his time in planning pleasure for the morrow and in thoroughly enjoying himself the day before. He was a Parisian of Parisians, and life for him had no higher meaning than to live; and his interpretation of 'to live' was gaiety of every possible kind, and hourly and daily ministration to the carnal pleasures. He had for some time been in business as a chemist, though his want of seriousness prevented him from succeeding. That, however, did not matter. His handsome person won him a lady who brought him a large *dot*; and just after his marriage an aunt died and left him a small fortune, so he sold the chemist's business, and retired to lead the only kind of existence that charmed him.

Madame Didet was a *petite* woman; not bad-looking, but

somewhat insipid. She was fair, with blue eyes, and rather wanting in expression. She was delicate, with a fragile form and a dreamy eye and a general languid appearance. Although she did not suffer from any actual illness, she was subject to attacks of hysteria. She was devoted to her husband, but exceedingly jealous of him; not, however, without good cause. He seemed to possess remarkable influence over her, an influence due to a certain magnetic power he exercised, and by which he was enabled to bend her to his will in almost every conceivable way.

It is necessary to say that Eugenia Suchard, their servant, was rather a stupid kind of woman; but she had been with Didet long before he was married, and she was much attached to her master and mistress.

When the Didets first went to live at 13 Rue Auber, the other half of the flat upon which they had their residence was not occupied. It had been without a tenant for some months, as people complained that the rent was too high. But soon after the Didets went there, the other half of the flat was taken by a Monsieur Charcot, who had been an officer in the army, but had been compelled to retire, owing to a wound he received, which unfitted him for military service. He was married, and between him and his wife was considerable disparity of age. He was about fifty, while she was not more than thirty, and was remarkably handsome. He was a reserved man, somewhat retiring in disposition, while she was volatile and fond of gaiety.

Between these two families, being close neighbours as they were, an intimacy soon sprang up. But it was not long before it became evident to Madame Didet that her husband was paying more attention to the pretty Madame Charcot than was consistent with mere neighbourly feeling. This led to some unpleasantness between Didet and his wife; but he assured her, vowed solemnly in fact, that is as solemnly as such a man could vow, that she was mistaken. She was satisfied, and things went on harmoniously again for some

time. But during this time Didet was falling desperately in love with his pretty neighbour, and she did not seem to object.

One day a picnic had been arranged between the two families, and Charcot and Didet, accompanied by their wives and another lady and gentleman, went out for the day. It was summer time and they took train to St. Germain. This is a favourite resort of the Parisians in the summer. It is a charming spot, a little paradise. There is a magnificent forest, many miles in extent, with romantic glades and entrancing walks, and there is a celebrated hotel, the Hôtel de Louis Quatorze. It stands in extensive grounds on a terrace that commands a magnificent panorama of the valley of the Seine, with the tortuous river threading its way with many folds and twists, like a silver serpent. Here in the grounds of this hotel are numerous bowers under the trees, and it is delightful to sit there on a summer day, the air languid with the scent of flowers and musical with bird-song, and partake of the exquisite dinner for which the hotel is famed.

The little party enjoyed themselves with all the *abandon* peculiar to the Parisian when out for the day. A *recherché* dinner was partaken of, and several bottles of choice wine were discussed, and over the cigars and coffee there was much laughter and joking. The French people are a light-hearted people. They live in the to-day. The to-morrow is but a dream, a vague shadow, to them. Madame Didet was particularly vivacious. The wine had heightened her colour and brightened her eyes, and as she toyed with a dainty cigarette, her laughter was silvery and light, as though she had not a care in the whole world.

The day was deepening to its close. Already the purple shadows were creeping along the valley, and the river was growing tawny in the fading light. Beneath a group of trees at the end of the terrace in the hotel garden, a man and a woman stood, all but hidden by the darkness caused by the trees. The man was Didet; the woman Madame Charcot. They had stolen away from the others, she first, he following

some time after. He held her hand, though she was trying to disengage it; and into her ear he was whispering in impassioned language these words: 'Agathe,' he called her by her Christian name, 'Agathe, why did Fate not bring us together years ago?'

'Ah!' she sighed.

'Agathe,' he cried, growing more excited as her sigh told him that his words found an echo in her own breast, 'Agathe, je t'aime!'[1] She started at this declaration, and in accents that told of her distress she said:

'No, no, Monsieur Didet; you must not talk to me like that. Remember my husband!'

'Mon Dieu!' hissed Didet fiercely, under his breath, 'I always remember him. Which devil was it that gave you a husband and me a wife before you and I met?'

'Hush, hush!' she said appealingly, 'we must be satisfied with our lot. *We*, we must not talk of love.'

'Agathe,' he murmured in stricken tones, 'have you no love for me?'

She averted her face from him, and whispered: 'I might have had.'

'You might have had!'

'Yes.'

'But why have you not now?'

'Because I am already a wife,' she sighed.

He threw his arms round her and drew her to his breast; but at that moment a man sprang forward, and, seizing her arm, he twisted her round, almost flinging her to the ground, and then with blazing eyes and white face he confronted Didet. The new-comer was Charcot, and, in a voice hoarse with passion, he exclaimed:

[1] *Je t'aime!*—'I love thee!' No one who has not heard a Frenchman utter this brief sentence can possibly have any knowledge of the force, the passion, the sentiment, the poetry, it is capable of expressing. The English equivalent—'I love you'—is tame and spiritless, as compared with *je t'aime*, as it falls from a Frenchman's mouth when he is declaring his love for a lady.

'I suspected this. You are a snake, and your very breath is poison! But beware how you tamper with my wife, lest I am tempted to kill her and you.'

Didet had nothing to say. He did attempt to stammer forth something in the nature of an excuse, but he knew his guilt, and the words stuck in his throat.

It was hardly possible that this scene could be kept from Madame Didet. She saw by her husband's face that something had happened, and guessed what that something was. And when Charcot took his wife away, and went back to Paris without the rest of the party, she knew that her guess was right. Then ensued a pitiable scene. She went into violent hysterics, and rent the air with her screams, and so unmanageable did she become, and so excited, that her husband decided not to return to Paris that night, but to remain with her at the hotel. All night long she raved, but towards the morning sank to sleep, waking up three hours later prostrated and ill.

Her husband went on his knees before her, and vowed that he was deeply repentant, and would never sin in the same way again. She sealed her forgiveness with kisses, and in the afternoon they returned to Paris perfectly reconciled. And when he arrived home he sought out Monsieur Charcot, and craved his pardon too, and so earnest did he seem, so humble was he—he shed so many tears, and made so many protestations—that Charcot, who was not a vindictive man, was moved, and said he would think no more of the matter. Thus the neighbourly relations were resumed, although the little episode had undoubtedly left some frigidity behind it.

If the serpent had not been in the garden of Eden, Eve would not have fallen; and had Charcot taken his wife away Didet might not have been tempted. But for weeks and months after that affair at St. Germain he saw her, and seeing sighed. And possibly, nay probably, something in her face, some look in her eyes, answered him.

It was a winter night. Snow was falling over Paris, but

nevertheless Monsieur Charcot and his wife had gone to the theatre and taken Madame Didet with them. Didet himself would not go. He pleaded a splitting headache and general *malaise*. His wife wished to remain and nurse him, but he would not hear of it. He said that he desired to be alone, to be perfectly quiet for a few hours, and insisted on her going. An hour later he gave his servant a couple of francs, telling her that she could invite Charcot's servant to a *petit souper* at a neighbouring café, and when they had gone he sprang from the couch on which he had been reclining with a towel round his head. He dashed the towel to the ground. His *malaise* seemed to have flown. He went on to the landing and listened. No one was coming up the stairs, or down from the other flats. All was silent as death, save for a gas jet on the next landing that hissed like an angry snake, in the cold blasts of air that rushed up the stairway. Didet took a latch-key from his pocket, and noiselessly opened Charcot's door. Then, with a pair of pincers and a screw-driver, he so altered the position of the check that held the latch when it was let down as to make it useless. The consequence of this was that anyone letting the latch down would not be aware that the check was damaged, and, of course, would imagine the door was fastened, whereas it could still be opened with a latch-key from the outside. Didet's object in doing this we shall presently see.

His work completed he went back to his own house, and smoked heavily, and drank some cognac. But at one o'clock, when his wife returned, he was asleep on the couch. She was tender and loving to him, and told him all about the play, and how she and the Charcots had supped at a cafe, partaking of oysters and *bouillon*, and *côtelettes à la tomates*, and pudding *au riz avec sauce à la rhum*, followed by *gruyère*, and some *petits fruits*, and for wine there had been a bottle of Graves and a bottle and a half of Château Margaux, for Monsieur Charcot, when he went to the theatre, liked to sup

well, and he was a connoisseur in wines. And then as a *finale* there had been *café noir* and a *petit verre*.

'Ah, mon mari!' she exclaimed, as she threw her arms round his neck, 'the supper was splendid, but mon cher, mon prince, I was so lonely without thee.'

He laughed, and kissed her. But it was a Judas kiss.

So Judas kissed his Master.

Then they went to bed, and through the snowy air the bells of Paris were booming two.

Silence!

Through the snowy air the bells of Paris were booming three.

Monsieur Didet rose from his bed, and arrayed himself in a thick woollen dressing-gown. A shaded lamp was burning low, but gave sufficient light to render objects in the room visible. He bent over his wife. She was sleeping soundly. The *petit souper* had not disagreed with her. He passed his hand over her head, first from back to front, and then from side to side. She moved, she half turned, she sighed deeply; but he made other passes, and she became passive. Presently he stood erect, and waved his hand up and down slowly. Then she rose. Her eyes were open, but fixed. Her face was pale. Her lips moved as if in speech, but no sounds issued.

'Get up!' said her husband softly.

She slipped from the bed with no apparent effort, and stood before him motionless, her white *robe de nuit* falling about her like the drapery of a statue. He opened a drawer in the dressing-table, and took out something. It was a weapon. He drew off a leather case, and revealed a long, sharp, and glittering stiletto. He grasped her hand, and then bent her white fingers round the handle of the deadly weapon. He next placed a small phial with a glass stopper in her other hand. That done he whispered something in her ear, and she began to move towards the door.

Through the snowy air the bells of Paris were booming half-past three.

He preceded her, opened the door and she passed out; a little shudder seemed to shake her as her bare feet came in contact with the cold stones. He crept across the landing, and with the latch-key opened Charcot's door. Then waving his hand he motioned her to enter. A dim light burned in the passage, and Madame Didet looked like a ghost. All was silent in Charcot's house. The woman moved without a sound, going first now. Didet crept after her on tiptoe. She reached Monsieur Charcot's bedroom. A lamp burned low there also. Charcot slept soundly in one bed, his wife in another.[1] Madame Didet bent over Charcot for a moment or two, then raised her arm high and plunged the long stiletto into his breast. The blood spurted from the wound and encrimsoned Madame Didét's night-dress.

The *petit souper* had caused Madame Charcot to sleep soundly, and she was all unconscious of what was going on.

Again Didet waved his hand, and his wife drew the stopper from the bottle she held. Then she placed the mouth of the phial to her lips. It was filled with a white, colourless fluid, and she poured this fluid down her throat. That act completed, Didet slipped away, leaving Charcot's door open, and his own open; but in his excitement he saw not a figure that cowered against the wall in the passage. He gained his room, and threw himself on his bed.

Through the snowy air the bells of Paris boomed four.

Didet rolled himself in the blankets, and fell asleep. It is astonishing how some men can sleep under every and any circumstances.

Through the air—it had ceased to snow—the bells of Paris boomed seven.

A little later the *laitier* (milkman) came up the stairs with the morning milk. On reaching the Didet-Charcot landing

[1] There are usually two beds in a French bedroom.

he was surprised to find the doors of both houses open: it was so unusual for them to be open at that time of the morning. He stood at Charcot's door, and called the servant, who had only just got out of bed. She could not account for the doors being opened. Moreover, in her master's door was a latch-key. What did this mean? In alarm she went to her master's room, and soon she uttered a cry of terror, for she saw a woman lying on the floor, and thought it was her mistress. The *laitier* went in and turned up the lamp. Then it was seen that Madame Charcot was in bed and awake—the cry had awakened her—while the night-dress of the woman on the floor was stained with blood. The man drew the curtains of Charcot's bed, then staggered back appalled, for the clothes were all red with blood, a long dagger was sticking in Charcot's breast, and he was dead.

With a scream of awful fear Madame Charcot now sprang up. She recognised the woman on the floor as Madame Didet. She was dead, and in her cold, marble-like hand she tightly grasped a phial.

The milkman rushed over to the Didets' house. Eugenia Suchard was already at the door. She looked like a corpse, so ghastly white was she.

'Mon Dieu! it's awful, awful!' groaned the man.

'Where's monsieur?'

'Sleeping soundly in his bed,' answered Eugenia with considerable firmness.

'There has been murder,' said the *laitier*. 'Mon Dieu! it's awful, awful!' Then he clattered down the stairs to spread the alarm. In wild terror, Madame Charcot rushed into Didet's house, and threw herself on to the floor. He came to her and tried to soothe her.

Presently the gendarmes arrived, and over the neighbourhood flew the news, and crowds collected, and the most wild and wonderful rumours were circulated. The tragedy was surrounded with mystery. But so far as the investigation of the police went, they were enabled to report that Madame

Didet seemed to have stolen from her husband's bedroom; to have entered Charcot's house by means of a duplicate key, had then stabbed him to the heart, and had poisoned herself at his bedside.

The motive?

Well, it could only be guessed at; but, no doubt, there had been some guilty *liaison* between the pair. Possibly—so it was suggested—he wanted to throw her off, and she had resolved to kill him and herself. It was by no means an unfamiliar story in Paris. So in a few days the gay Parisians shrugged their shoulders and said: 'These things will happen. How sorry we are for poor Madame Charcot and poor Monsieur Didet! Mon Dieu! it is terrible!'

And so with this sympathy they dismissed the subject, and went on with their gaiety again.

In a few weeks Monsieur Didet gave up his house in the Rue Auber, for he said he could not live in it. The associations were too terrible. The veuve Charcot also changed her residence, and went to live in the same neighbourhood, in fact in the next block of buildings. Four months later Monsieur Didet announced that he was going to marry the pretty veuve Charcot. Then his servant Eugenia Suchard, whom he had retained, said:

'No, monsieur, you shall not marry that woman.'

Didet thought that his poor old servant had got a little cracked, and laughed heartily. But with terrible emphasis Eugenia repeated:

'No, monsieur, you *shall not* marry that woman.'

'Why?' asked her master, growing serious.

'Because I forbid it.'

'You?'

'Yes.'

Didet was ashen now. Something in Eugenia's manner caused his blood to chill.

'What do you mean?' he gasped.

'I mean what I say. I have held my peace all too long.

I loved my mistress, and I have loved you, but I will not see this last outrage committed.'

'You are mad!' he said, as his courage came back, for he mistook her words. 'Madame veuve Charcot and I will assuredly become man and wife.'

'No,' said the woman sternly, 'for I'll denounce you first.' Once more Didet's face assumed an ashen hue. 'On that fearful night I saw all,' she added. 'I had supped with the Charcots' servant. I had drunk some bad wine, and it gave me cramps, so that I could not sleep. I heard you open the door, and was alarmed. Coming to see what was the matter, I saw you and madame go out. She was in her nightdress and asleep. You had mesmerised her. I followed you like a shadow, and saw madame plunge the knife into Monsieur Charcot's body. Then I fled in horror.'

Didet was almost paralysed with surprise and fear. He thought that no human eye had witnessed the deed, and that no human soul had even deemed it possible that he had done this dreadful thing. Here was a revelation. He had committed a fearful crime in order to gain the woman to whom he had given his guilty love. When he had somewhat recovered himself, his first impulse was to kill this sole witness of his guilt, and he endeavoured to seize her. But she escaped, and ran screaming into the street. He knew then that he was a doomed man, and in the madness of despair and fear he shot himself. And thus Nemesis revenged the dark crime of the Rue Auber, and the gay Parisians, when they heard of the sequel to the Rue Auber crime, shrugged their shoulders, and talked of it for an hour or two; then they said: 'Ah, these things will happen!' and so they went on with their gaiety again.

XXII

THE STRANGE STORY OF DR. MARTIN

Doctor Martin was an extraordinary man in almost every sense in which that word can be applied. He was below the medium height, standing not more than five-feet four and a-half. He had a narrow chest, with sloping shoulders somewhat like a woman. He was thin almost to emaciation, and his clothes hung about him in a loose, ill-fitting way. A stranger seeing him for the first time was moved to pity, thinking the man must be suffering from some obscure, wasting disease, and that his days were numbered. But this feeling wore off on a closer acquaintance, for the doctor was not only remarkably active, but endowed with a vigour of constitution and a power of endurance that might have begot the envy of men of far more robust build. As a matter of fact, the doctor had never had a day's illness in his life worth speaking of, and at the time the event occurred which I shall now relate, he was verging on sixty. However unattractive his body was, no one could look upon his face without feeling, in a sense, fascinated. His complexion was sallow, his cheeks hollow, but every feature was as delicately and clearly cut as those of a classical statue. The quivering lips, beautifully chiselled, were expressive of intellectual subtlety ; but it was in the high, white, massive forehead that the intellectuality was displayed, as well as in the deep-set, almost unnaturally brilliant, and restless dark eyes. His face in all its workings revealed the innate force of character and strong individuality

of the man. When stirred by inward emotion or passion, his face was a marvellous study. Then his eyes seemed to blaze, and every muscle and line twitched with the tremendous nerve energy that was aroused. In repose his face had somewhat of a dreamy expression, but once let it thrill with animation and the contrast was striking, if not startling. His voice was rich and full of volume. And when heard for the first time the listener was astounded at so melodious a voice being associated with so meagre a man.

Martin was a native of Cork, but had been educated in Dublin, and was an M.D. and M.A. of Trinity College of that city. At an early age he displayed remarkable precocity, which did not, as is usually the case with precocious children, develop into dulness at a later period. Obtaining his degree when quite a young man, he removed to London, and his force of character and natural cleverness soon won a practice for him. At thirty-two or -three he married an Irish lady, who was an exceedingly commonplace woman—good-looking enough and not without intelligence, but still she belonged to a very ordinary type, though she adored her husband and looked upon him as something almost more than mortal. A year after the marriage a daughter came to bless the union, and surely man never idolised a child as Martin idolised this one. But before she had reached the age of seven she was carried off suddenly by croup, and for a time the blow seemed to crush her father. She was the only child, and on her the parents seemed to have centred all their hopes. So much did the child's death prey upon the mother's mind that she fell seriously and dangerously ill, and her life was threatened. The prospect of this fresh loss aroused the doctor from his stupor, and the old energy came back, though he appeared somehow to be a changed man. He began to preach the doctrine that, save by accident, no human being should die young; and he declared that within reach of the chemist's art was an elixir of life, and he vowed that he would devote all his energies and study to discovering it. But his first

attention was given to his sick wife, to whom he was no less devotedly attached than she was to him. With untiring watchfulness he tended her, and it might be said that he ransacked his laboratory for an antidote to her disease. And, though he was not able to cry Eureka! and say he had found the precise elixir he sought, he nevertheless succeeded in baffling her illness, and she slowly recovered. This stimulated him to renewed research, and, though for a time he did not relax his attention to his general practice, he ultimately became so absorbed in his idea that he grew into a monomaniac, and so forgetful of everything else, that he neglected his patients and gradually lost them. This did not affect him, however, as, independent of some private means of his own, he had money through his wife, so that he had no financial difficulties to contend against or to distress him.

Thoroughly imbued with his idea his wife aided him so far as she was capable of doing. At any rate his word was to her law: his wishes, her pleasure to try and anticipate.

Up to that time they had been residing in a somewhat small, though compact, house in Kensington, but he complained that it was too small for his work, and after a little delay he discovered a house to his mind at Hampstead. It was a large, old-fashioned place, detached, and standing in a considerable area of ground that was shaded with trees of great age. As the house had been untenanted for some time, it was dilapidated and forlorn looking, while the neglected grounds had run to rank weeds.

Doctor Martin and his wife were too much absorbed with their one thought to give any attention to their premises, and so the garden was allowed to remain as it was, and but little was done to improve the external appearance of the house, although a woman was engaged as general servant. In the upper part of the premises were four good-sized rooms, and the doctor had these thrown into one large chamber, which he fitted up in a most elaborate manner as a laboratory. In this place he gathered together the most costly chemical apparatus

and scientific instruments of all kinds, and then he entirely abandoned himself to the search for that wonderful elixir of life.

Of course Dr. Martin and his partner soon acquired the reputation of being eccentric, and some people even spoke of them as 'cracked.' The neglected appearance of their house and grounds fostered this idea, and moreover Martin made no secret of what he was bent upon. In fact he proclaimed it to anyone who would listen to him, and at such times his enthusiasm was marvellous; his eyes glowed with kindling light, his face became suffused with a deep flush, his nostrils quivered, and his melodious voice rolled forth a flood of eloquence, until his listeners, falling under his spell of fascination, stared at him in open-mouthed amazement. He did not talk as an empiric or a mountebank. His learning and his wondrous knowledge enabled him to speak with an air of authority. He quoted the most erudite authors in support of his views. His theme was that nature held the secret, if not of perennial youth, at least of prolonging life to a very extreme age, and he was determined to wrest the secret from her.

If this was madness it was certainly a very harmless sort of madness, and calculated to result in good. For be it remembered that up to the time of his daughter's death and his wife's dangerous illness, the doctor had been as other men. He was a philosopher, a scholar, a clever doctor, a humanitarian, and capable of subtle reasoning. He had the faculty of keen observation, and the power of drawing inferences from what he saw. Such a man might become a monomaniac, but it was a foregone conclusion that the world would be the better for anything he might devote his talents to. In his search for the philosopher's stone he was likely to stumble upon something else, that in a practical and utilitarian age would be scarcely less valuable. At any rate this was his own view of the matter. Presently we shall see if he was right. It would be impossible to set forth by mere

description the nature of the experiments and the research to which Doctor Martin devoted his days and often part of his nights. His enthusiasm knew no bounds. His perseverance never flagged, his determination could not be daunted. And in his wife he found a patient, willing helpmate, who watched his eyes for her orders, and obeyed him by a sign. To this one object his life was now concentrated, and year after year he pursued that object with unflagging zeal.

Under such long-continued study, without break, without change, the health of most men would have broken down. But not only was Martin not affected, but to the astonishment of all who knew him he seemed rather to grow younger than older. His face did not change, his eye lost none of its brightness, his hair showed no signs of grey. People wondered, as was only natural they should, and when some ventured to question him he answered with a smile of triumph that his labours had not been altogether profitless, and he had discovered a means of preserving the youth, though as yet his secret was not ripe enough for disclosure. When the news of this spread about, as nothing could prevent its doing, numbers of people flocked to Doctor Martin's house, begging of him to give them the means of preserving their youth, and had he been inclined he might have reaped a large fortune. But he despised money. He said he was a servant of science, and that he laboured in the cause of humanity, and when he had thoroughly proved the value of his discovery he would make it known to the world, but not before. The people were disappointed, but he was firm, and no offer of money, no persuasion, could tempt him.

And so for many years Doctor Martin went on in his harmless way, until at last a terrible blow fell upon him—a blow that broke his hopes for a time, and seemed to indicate that his years of labour had been utterly useless. This blow was the death of his devoted wife. She was suddenly seized with apoplexy, and, though he called in the assistance of

several eminent doctors, they could do nothing. She never rallied, never recovered consciousness, and in twelve hours after the seizure was dead. For the first time Martin's zeal seemed to cool, his energies to desert him, under this heavy affliction. He blamed himself for having allowed his studies to so absorb his attention that he had been blind to his wife's failing health. He vowed that had he not been so blind he could have preserved her life for many years.

Her death seemed like a bitter commentary on all that he had been doing, or had done, and of course the world wasn't slow to mock at him. But reverses with such a man only meant fresh stimulus, nor was he likely to be long bowed, however severe the storm that might sweep over his head. His devouring zeal would not permit of that. Inactivity to him would have meant madness or death. And so he once more turned his attention to his favourite pursuits, and displayed utter indifference to the many cruel and spiteful things that were said about him.

For two or three years more Doctor Martin went on in his old way, forgetting the world and by the world forgot. He had dropped out of the memory of even his old colleagues, and people who had once been his friends deserted him. It is ever so in this world. A man who elects to pursue a course away from the beaten track must go alone. The pioneer, if he succeeds, is hailed with acclamation; but if he fails he is laughed at, and if he dies on his way the world shrugs its shoulders, says that he shouldn't have attempted such a thing, and then forgets him. But there was one mystery that those who saw Martin could not be altogether indifferent about. Age seemed to bring him none of those physical changes that it brings to all men. Although he was now near sixty, he looked little or no older than he did at forty. His eye was as bright, his step as elastic, his hair as dark, his energy as undiminished as ever it was. And it began to be asked whether he had really discovered some antidote against physical decay. Doctor Martin himself was silent on the subject. If

he was aware of the curiosity that was thus being revived he heeded it not. He had his own secrets and knew how to keep them.

One day he called upon a colleague of his, but one whom he had not seen for many years. This was Doctor John Brennan, then a man verging on eighty years of age, although he was perfectly hale and hearty. Doctor Brennan was very well known as the author of several medical works, and for nearly forty years he had been prominently connected with one of the great London hospitals.

Brennan was surprised to see his old friend. 'I've quite lost sight of you for some years,' he said, after the greetings were over; 'but, bless my life! you don't seem to have changed a bit. What have you been doing? Have you discovered some magical elixir that is capable of preserving perennial youth?'

'Yes,' said Martin drily, 'I have.' Of course his friend laughed, but Martin proceeded to relate with impressive seriousness the many experiments that he had been so long engaged upon. He declared that he had succeeded in compounding a remarkable chemical substance, which seemed to have the property of retarding the ravages of age, and he drew attention to himself as a living example of the truth of what he said. 'But,' he exclaimed enthusiastically, 'I have done more than that, Brennan. I have discovered a means of suspending animation for practically an unlimited period. It is wonderful, but it is true. A person can be put to sleep for a month, a year, two years, any number of years, and at the end of any given period revived again. Need I point out the enormous value of this discovery if it can be clearly demonstrated that it will do what I state? I have reason to believe that during this narcotic sleep—for so it is—all disease, no matter what its nature, would leave the body, and the sleeper would awake with renewed vigour, strength and health, and consequently with a renewed lease of life.' Dr. Brennan smiled incredulously, and seemed disposed to question his

friend's sanity. But Martin argued so eloquently, so learnedly, and so convincingly, that at last Brennan asked :

'Well, what is it you wish me to do ? '

'I will tell you. Hitherto my experiments have been carried out upon animals only. Now, I intend to submit myself to the experiment, and I want you to form a committee to watch the effects, and to testify to the accuracy of what I say.'

Brennan seemed reluctant to fall in with this arrangement. In his own mind he thought the thing too ridiculous for serious consideration, and he suggested that a younger man, and one of the new school, should be asked to take the matter up. But Martin urged that his friend's high reputation and great talents were what had induced him to apply to him, for he wanted to place the matter beyond the reach of ridicule or doubt. The result of the interview was that Doctor Brennan consented to think the matter over, and, if he saw his way clear to accede to the request, he would then speak to some of his friends, and they would arrange to meet at Martin's house and go into the affair more fully. On this understanding they parted, and a week later Martin received a letter from Brennan to say that he and an old colleague, Doctor Paterson Walker, would call on a certain day at his, Martin's, house. The visit was made, and it is testimony to the eloquence and cleverness of Doctor Martin that he was enabled to carry something like conviction to the minds of these staid, scientific men ; for they consented to organise a committee and investigate Martin's alleged discovery. Doctor Martin stipulated that he was not to disclose his secret until after the experiment. This was somewhat unwillingly agreed to, and all the necessary arrangements having been made, and a committee of eight well-known medical men, including Brennan and Walker, having been formed, a day was fixed for the commencement of the experiment.

Dr. Martin first of all signed a paper, in which he declared that what he was about to do was done in the interests of science and the cause of suffering humanity, and that it was of his

own free-will and at his earnest desire that the experiment was to be carried out.

This document having been duly attested by every one of the gentlemen present, Doctor Martin produced two phials. One contained four ounces of a perfectly colourless viscid fluid, not unlike glycerine in consistency. The other contained about two ounces of a bright amber, limpid fluid. The doctor explained that he would swallow the white fluid, and that within half an hour afterwards he would sink into a profound sleep, that gradually all the functions would cease, or seem to cease, the face would assume a waxen pallor, and the respiration would be imperceptible. In this condition he might be kept for an indefinite period, but three months was fixed as the limit in his case. At the end of that time the inside of the mouth and tongue were to be wetted with a feather dipped in the amber fluid. This would gradually cause the breathing to recommence. Then the fluid was to be poured down the throat drop by drop, until it was all swallowed, and full animation had returned.

A bedroom had been prepared with a bed specially arranged, and when Doctor Martin had suitably attired himself he lay down on the bed and drank the white liquid. As he had predicted, he fell into a deep sleep, and a little later he had all the appearance of a corpse, save that there was a slight warmth about the body, and a faint flush on the face. This condition lasted for a week without any change, and the watchers began to think that Martin had really discovered the means of suspending animation and restoring it again. Another week passed, and the only noticeable change then was that the face had become more waxen, and the most delicate tests failed to detect either the breathing or warmth in the body. But the committee felt no alarm, for there were signs that were not compatible with death, and their excitement and interest increased as it seemed probable that the experiment would be successful.

Two months passed, and the same condition was main-

tained, to the amazement of the committee. It was then decided as a test to make a small puncture in the arm. This was done, and blood flowed, incontestably proving that the man was alive. As the time for re-awakening him approached the excitement was intense, and it was felt that a tremendous triumph was in store for science, and that the name of this extraordinary little man, who had devoted twenty years to perfecting his discovery, would be immortalised.

At length the day for the awakening came; and, in addition to the original committee, two eminent scientists, and two other doctors requested to be present, the request being granted. When all was ready the amber fluid was applied as Martin had directed, and its effect was watched with breathless anxiety and eagerness. Sure enough the breathing became perceptible, and the fluid was poured down the throat and *swallowed*. Then those standing round noticed, not without alarm, that the waxen pallor of the face gave place to a dirty, greyish hue, that deepened to brown, and gradually changed to mahogany colour.

What did this mean? Surely something was wrong?

No warmth could be detected in the body, and the breathing was no longer perceptible. But now a more astounding change took place. The hair gradually blanched until it was white, the eyes fell in, and an extraordinary appearance of age came into the face. It was drawn and puckered, with the bones showing through the brown skin until it looked for all the world like the wizened face of a sick monkey. The spectators were appalled, and frantic efforts were made to restore animation. But all was useless, and one and all shrank back in loathing and horror, for on the bed before them was a withered and decayed corpse, so decayed that on someone touching one of the hands the bones of the fingers broke away.

When the onlookers had recovered from the shock this wonderful and startling change had produced upon them, they proceeded to examine the body. That Martin was dead was

beyond all doubt, and his body had all the appearance of a corpse many weeks old. The odour from it was unbearable, and all the flesh had assumed the mummified appearance.

This ghastly ending to the experiment was a great blow to those who had consented to watch it. But what was the mystery? for mystery there most certainly was. For three months Martin had lain on the bed like a waxen image, without the slightest sign of decay or change of any kind; but, as soon as the revivifying elixir was applied, the appalling transformation commenced. But the most incomprehensible part of the mystery was that breathing was detected at first, and the fluid was actually swallowed; but then, within an incredibly short space of time, all the conditions of old age set in, followed by putridity and decay.

No man there, and yet they were all men of extreme cleverness, could offer a word of explanation. They had seen with their own eyes and were ready to swear on oath to the facts I have narrated, but they could not account for them. Doctor Martin, after twenty years of study, had succeeded in giving his fellow-men a problem which has never been solved and is never likely to be; and the secret of his wonderful elixirs, by which he had really preserved his youth and for three months had prevented his body from decaying, was lost with him.

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